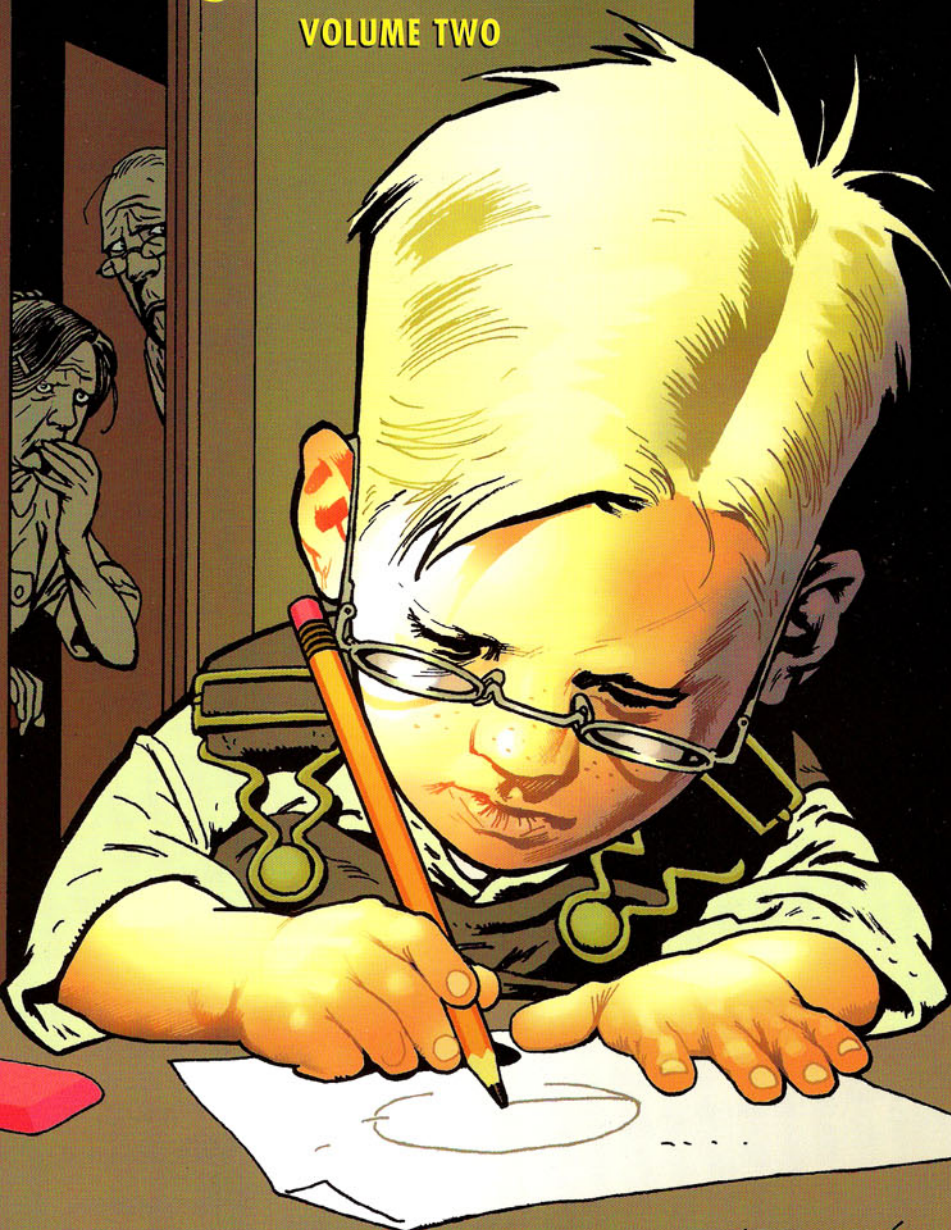


THE
BEST
OF

DRAW!

VOLUME TWO



JACK B. QUICK TM AND © 2006 AMERICA'S BEST COMICS LLC

STEP-BY-STEP LESSONS & INTERVIEWS BY TOP PROS IN COMICS, CARTOONING, & ANIMATION!

THE
BEST
OF

DRAW!

VOLUME
TWO

STEP-BY-STEP LESSONS & INTERVIEWS BY TOP PROS IN COMICS, CARTOONING, & ANIMATION!



TwoMorrows Publishing
Raleigh, North Carolina

THE BEST OF *DRAW!*

VOLUME TWO

Edited and designed by Mike Manley
Front cover illustration by Kevin Nowlan
Proofreading by Eric Nolen-Weathington and John Morrow



TwoMorrows Publishing
10407 Bedfordtown Drive
Raleigh, North Carolina 27614
www.twomorrows.com • e-mail: twomorrow@aol.com

First Printing • August 2006 • Printed in Canada

ISBN: 1-893905-58-6

Trademarks & Copyrights

All contributions herein are copyright 2006 by their respective contributors. All artwork herein is copyright the year of production, its creator (if work-for-hire, the entity which contracted said artwork); the characters featured in said artwork are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners; and said artwork or other trademarked material is printed in these pages with the consent of the copyright holder and/or for journalistic, educational and historical purposes with no infringement intended or implied. Azrael, Batgirl, Batman, Brainiac, Demon, Green Arrow, Green Lantern, Joker, Jonni Thunder, Kung-Fu Fighter, Lobo, Man-Bat, Mary Marvel/Shazam, Phantom Lady, Sarge Steel, Speedy, Supergirl, Superman, Wild Dog, Wonder Woman TM and © 2006 DC Comics • Absorbing-man, Angel, Bucky, Captain America, Captain Marvelli, Colossus, Dr. Doom, Dr. Strange, Forge, Iceman, Iron man, Katie Pride, Mr. Fantastic, Nova, Sleepwalker, Spider-Man, Storm, Sub-mariner, The Hulk, The Human Torch, The New Mutants, The Thing, Wolverine TM and © 2006 Marvel Characters Inc. • Major Damage TM and © 2006 Chris Bailey • Dr. Direct © 2006 Brooks Instruments • Stephanie Starr © 2006 Mike Friedrich and Dick Giordano • Black Pete, Clerks the animated series, Hercules, Kim Possible, Nessus TM and © 2006 The Walt Disney Corporation • John Carter of Mars TM and © 2006 The Edgar Rice Burroughs Estate • Dalgoda © 2006 Strnad and Fujitaki • The Savage Dragon © and TM 2006 Erik Larsen • The Phantom TM and © 2006 King Features Syndicate • Aliens Havoc © 2006 Dark Horse Comics • Aliens TM and © 2006 20th Century Fox • Vampirella TM and © 2006 Harris Comics • Samurai Jack TM & © 2006 Cartoon Network • Tom Strong and Jack B. Quick TM and © 2006 America's Best Comics LLC. This entire book is © 2006 Action Planet Inc. and TwoMorrows Publishing and may not be reprinted or retransmitted without written permission of the copyright holders.

Dedication

This collection is dedicated to my best buddy in the whole world, Bret Blevins, whose years of support, candor, friendship, quest for knowledge, hard won skill, and love of all art within and beyond the pages of *DRAW!* magazine have made the journey through life, work, and up Art Mountain define in spirit and deed, the truest meaning of friend!

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Erik Larsen, Dick Giordano, Dave Cooper, Kevin Nowlan, Chris Bailey, Ande Parks, and Paul Rivoche for giving of their time, and sharing their knowledge and love of the medium of comics. I'd also like to thank all of the loyal retailers, and you, the fan and regular customer of *DRAW!*—without your continuing support, we wouldn't be here.

THE
BEST
OF

DRAW!

VOLUME
TWO

CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION BY MIKE MANLEY	4
STORYBOARDING 101	
A NEW TUTORIAL BY MIKE MANLEY	6
PENCILING & INKING	
BY KEVIN NOWLAN	26
SKETCHBOOK BY BRET BLEVINS	44
COLOR SECTION	49
DIGITAL COLORING TECHNIQUES BY DAVE COOPER	50

WEBCOMICS BY MIKE MANLEY	54
ANIMATION BY CHRIS BAILEY	68
INKING BY DICK GIORDANO	80
REVIEWS OF MARKERS AND PAPERS BY ANDE PARKS	90
FIGURE DRAWING BY BRET BLEVINS	97
PENCILING BY ERIK LARSEN	113
COMPOSING FIGURES BY BRET BLEVINS	136



BONUS FULL-COLOR SECTION!

Featuring Dave Cooper's digital coloring techniques (page 50) and Mike Manley's webcomics (page 54)!

INTRODUCTION



Another humorous caricature of Mike by his pal Blev.

Welcome to the second collection of *DRAW!* magazine! As with our first collection, which is well into its second printing, we gathered the best of the best from our now sold out issues #3 and #4 for this second in our "best of" series. Over the past few years, whenever I visit a school or do a convention, I am always told how *DRAW!* is "...the

best magazine on drawing for comics ever," or, "Why didn't someone do this long ago?" Many a college teacher as well as high school teacher have written me to say they use *DRAW!* as a teach text in their classrooms... now, almost no compliment is better than that.

The kudos are much appreciated. *DRAW!* is really a labor of love not only by myself, but by my stalwart contributors, especially Bret Blevins and Alberto Ruiz—and also by my team at TwoMorrrows: Eric Nolen-Weathington and John Morrow, without whom this magazine would never make it to press and would most certainly be full of horrible spelling errors! One couldn't ask for better corner men.

The fact is that this is a hard magazine to produce. Choosing whom to interview, what subjects to show and how to present them—visiting each new artist and trying to give you the best glimpse into their working methods—is not always easy, but it is always interesting. Since I have been teaching myself for four years, I have come to appreciate even more what *DRAW!* can share, can teach, and how rare it is in this industry to

get a hands-on lesson. I have also learned that good teachers are also as rare as hen's teeth. This industry of comics has always been a hand-me-down one—from pro to assistant, at least in the old days—but I fear so much knowledge of each great cartoonist or illustrator has been and could be missed if it isn't officially put down on paper, and that's a big part of what I want to accomplish with *DRAW!*

I also wanted to add something new and fresh to this collection, so looking at the requests I receive, I put together a section on storyboarding, something I have been asked to do many times. The article, "Storyboarding 101," covers some basics and is based on of the class I teach on the subject at the Delaware College of Art and Design. It should help anyone curious about it get a solid overview and get started if they are interested in the field.

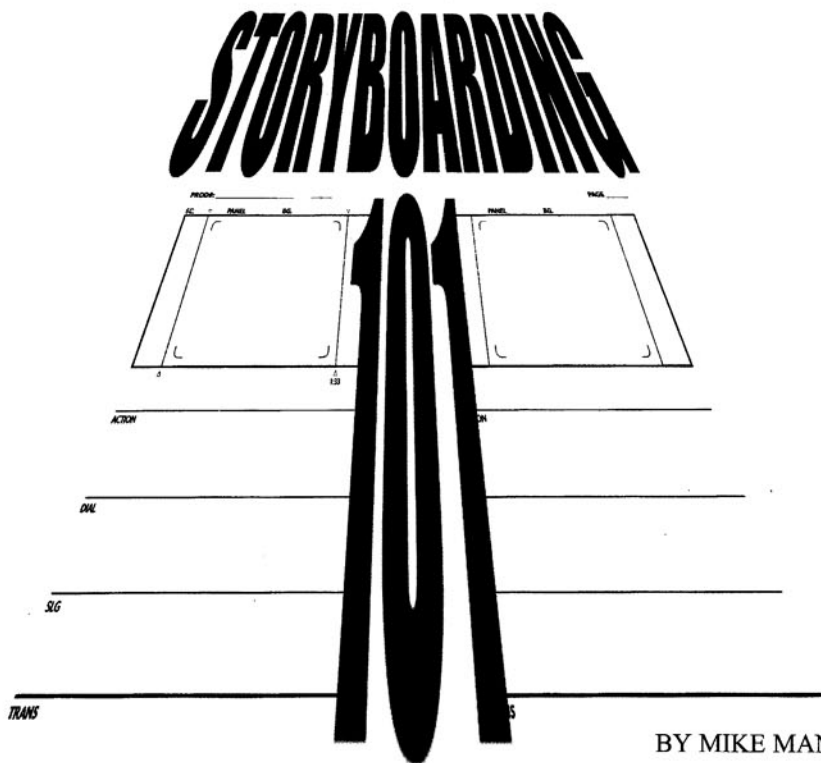
So enjoy this second "Best of" compilation, which is indeed a collection of some of today's best cartoonists and illustrators working in the fields of comics and animation. Keep your pencils sharp, brushes pointed, your ink wet, and get into the studio and create!

Best,

Mike Manley, editor

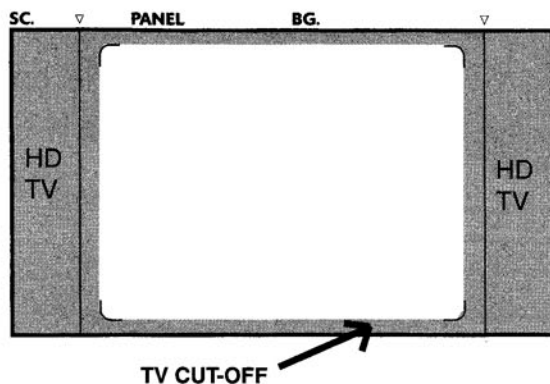
You can reach me via E-mail: mike@actionplanet.com from my web site: www.actionplanet.com or snail mail at: PO Box 2129, Upper Darby, PA 19082

Find out more about Draw! Magazine at:
www.drawmagazine.com



BY MIKE MANLEY

Over the last several years I have received many requests from *DRAW!* readers to do an article on storyboarding, especially for animation. It's a field that employs many, many artists and can be very lucrative, though it is very demanding in both the amount and volume of drawing required by the artist, depending on the job. Some shows I have worked on, like *Samurai Jack* and *Fairly Odd Parents*, have required I turn in storyboards that are 250-300+ pages in length. Storyboarding requires drawing power and speed to say the least. So I thought, what better place than the second volume of our collected *Best Of DRAW!* series to cover the subject and give the aspiring storyboard artist the 101 basics? Much of the material here was originally prepared for the classes I teach at the Delaware College of Art and Design in Wilmington, Delaware. The main difference is that in class, I give assignments and then critique the students' homework, something I won't be able to do here, though you are always free to post your work for critiques on the *DRAW!* message board: <http://65.204.15.75/cgi-bin/Ultimate.cgi>



The humble storyboard. Just about every great film and certainly every feature cartoon or TV cartoon as well as commercials begin here with pencil and the storyboard artist's imagination. The grey area is the cut-off area; this is for High Definition TV ratios, as the proportion on the TV screen changes across the globe. The area in the brackets indicates the area that also might be cut-off depending on the TV set, so all the important action and composition, figures, etc., must clearly be within this area or they risk being cut-off on the TV screen.

PROD#: _____		PAGE _____	
SC.	PANEL	BG.	V
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> ACTION Here the board artist writes down what is happening in this scene. </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> DIAL Here the board artist puts down the dialogue from the script for each character. </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> SLG This is where the Timer times out the animation for the scene to tell the animator how long this action will be. </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> TRANS If this cartoon is being animated overseas (like most TV shows are) the translation of what happens is written here. </div>			

SC.	PANEL	BG.	V
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> ACTION </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> DIAL </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> SLG </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> TRANS </div>			

ABOVE: This is the storyboard page for the typical TV cartoon series, it's on a legal size sheet of paper 8½" x 14". The storyboard is referred to by everyone working on the cartoon, from the director to the producer to the animators, layout artists and background artists. The entire show or film is here on paper. The typical show like *Batman* or *Spongebob* will have two eleven-minute acts or three seven-minute acts to fit into the standard 22-minute TV episode. That ends up being 150 to 300+ pages of storyboards for the average artist depending on the type of show; comedy shows have more dialogue and tend to have longer boards.

THE STORYBOARD ARTIST

The storyboard is a graphic and sequential depiction of a narrative.

The storyboard artist is the chief architect of the narrative, equal and in some cases more responsible for the final film's narrative success than the director.

The storyboard contains the information necessary for animators, background designers and crew members involved in production to do their jobs. Everyone always refers to the storyboard to answer their questions. It's the blueprint.

One of the most important phases in the pre-production of any cartoon, movie or video games is the storyboard. In this crucial phase, the director works closely with an artist(s) who illustrates every shot and scene in the movie, cartoon, commercial or game in detail. It is here that the director fleshes-out his vision, and it is an essential stage of the development process. TV and movie storyboards must contain all relevant details (camera moves, SFX, visuals, etc.) and anything else the production crew needs to know.

It needs to be detailed enough so each following production member or artist knows what to do. In the case of live action movies, boards are essential in planning out multi-million dollar

productions. They give the director and the studio a clear picture of exactly what will be happening throughout the entire movie production, and exactly what it will look like, and more importantly to the producers—where their money is going. It is essentially the entire movie on paper.

SKILLS

As a board artist you need to be able draw any person, place or thing, which exists or can be dreamed of, from any angle, often out of your head, and fast. You must be able to tell a story and tell it well in an entertaining, clear and inventive fashion. You must be motivated, and enjoy the process of drawing, storytelling and problem solving.

An animation storyboard artist must be not only fast, but flexible in style, be able to mimic the style of the show they are working on. You must be like a chameleon. Again, speed is essential, as the typical turnaround for an 11-minute act of a 22-minute TV cartoon is as little as three weeks, sometimes four. Usually the board artist is supplied with a script, designs, board paper, and if possible, a voice track of the actors.

Commercial storyboards often have even less time than that,

SHOT CHOICE

Most storytelling can be done in film and animation using a combination of these five basic shots. The wrong shot choice can weaken or ruin a scene or sequence.

ESTABLISHING SHOT



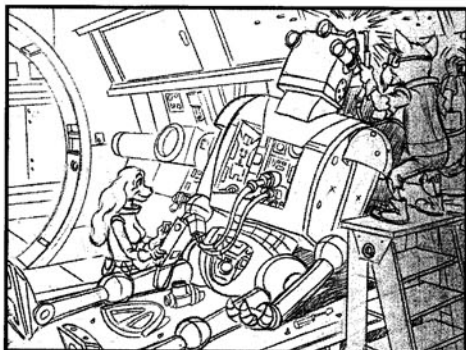
This shot shows us where the story or action takes place, city or jungle, the time of day, etc.

ESTABLISHING SHOT



This shot is a bit more specific; it clearly shows us a specific location in the story.

MEDIUM ESTABLISHING SHOT



This type shows us the characters in their environment. Most action and sports sequences are shot this way.

MEDIUM SHOT



This shot takes us into focus on a specific character and his or her action. This is very effective for important dialogue.

CLOSE-UP



This shot is used to show an actor or character acting or giving a very important bit of dialogue. In live action, the actor lives for this type of shot.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP



This shot is only used for dramatic effect, like extreme horror or danger, to show something small, or small actions like pushing a button. It can be used to punch-up a scene, but overuse makes it less effective.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SHOT FOR THE SCENE

Any cartoon, movie or TV show is made up of a series of shots or scenes which are edited together to make a drama. In a film or cartoon each scene is also assigned a number to keep them in order and to help everyone working on the project keep everything in order as well, from the director to the copyboy Xeroxing copies.

How you choose to stage the business going on or your "shot choice" is the most important decision you make as a storyboard artist. You are deciding what is shown and how it is shown. So the first thing you have to learn is the basic list of shot choices that 100% of all drama you ever board will use, be it a cartoon about talking dogs or a super-action *Matrix*-like movie. The wrong choice of shot might mean something important is not shown or something not important is!

The Establishing Shot: This shot does exactly what it describes, it establishes where the drama is happening. It is all encompassing; we can see the big set-up of the villain's hideout or the city, planet, country, etc., where our story happens.

The Medium Establishing Shot: This shot also covers exactly what it describes; it's not too close and not too far out. Most action is effectively shown in a medium shot where you can see the figures in action and the place where the action happens. Most sporting events are a combination of establishing and medium shots.

Medium Shot: This shot takes us in to see something more specific, like an actor's performance or some more important bit of business.

The Close-up: This shot is in even tighter, the standard is to set this shot to include the head down to the mid-torso on the figure or to show a specific action like a hand grabbing a phone, gun, etc. In the close-up we get the actors giving us their most important lines and we can see the expressions well—something dramatic is happening or is being said.

Extreme Close-up: This shot is used the least of all shot choices, as it is only for effect, for a visual punch, i.e. the close-up of an eyeball, expression or something that requires the camera to be extremely tight on something for a very dramatic or graphic effect. If overused it loses its impact and can turn a drama into a comedy or rob a horror film of its punch. Use this shot sparingly.

sometimes a one-day or overnight turnaround for a rush client. The pay can be very good, but you earn those dollars with all-nighters and the quick deadlines. Being able to meet the deadlines is essential in this business. Genius is okay, but a genius who's five hours late or blows a deadline doesn't impress anybody.

Rough storyboard sketches are referred to as Thumbnails, while more detailed drawings would be called Finished or Final Storyboard Panels.

In an animated storyboard, everything in the scene is there for a purpose. All the elements must work compositionally to help the eye flow, mood, rhythm and story. Nothing is taken for granted. There are no accidents. Everything counts.

In TV animation, the storyboard artist is the director and the actors all rolled into one. Often, the board artist is also the production designer and must have good design skills, as he/she will be called on to draw props, environments and other characters that have not had designs provided. The staging of action sequences as well as acting on a smaller, more personal level is a must. You must be an actor on paper.

THE BOARD ARTIST IS THE PROBLEM SOLVER

Whatever doesn't work in the script, or is weak, will quickly become apparent in the storyboard. It's where the rubber hits the road. This is where a good board artist can shine and is invaluable in solving a problem where sequences don't hook up or flow well. This is especially true in TV animation boards where the board

artist is essentially the director. The director is more of an executive director, overseeing the final boards, designs, timing sheets, etc. and making changes if needed. The person doing this is sometimes the executive producer or the creator of the show and comes in after the board is done to plus things or accent sequences.

In the feature animation story departments, things are a bit different. Once a sequence is finished, these drawings—which resemble a series of sketches, similar to a comic strip outlining the action and dialogue in a scene—would be pinned up on a bulletin board and arranged, re-arranged and replaced as the story took shape and is "pitched," or acted out. This is generally done in a group meeting, where the directing and story teams get to review the film's progress, and the sequence is critiqued. With the feedback the board artists get, they return again to their drawing tables to rework what is weak or to do a final polished board.

The study of films, particularly the best ones by the best directors and animators, is essential. Watching and analyzing the work of the great movie directors such as Wells, Capra, Kubrick, Hitchcock, etc., is highly recommended.

The study and freeze-frame watching of great animated movies is also essential to learning animation and technical effects. The storyboard artist must have a firm grasp of the film language. The clarity of the narrative and storytelling editing is up to you. A good board artist can plus a weak script; a bad board artist can ruin a great one.

TELLING THE STORY—SHOT MECHANICS

As the storyboard artist, you are often the chief architect of the film—and in TV often moreso than the actual director. In film you may work in a more collaborative fashion with the director. He or she may have very definite ideas of what they want to show and how they want to pace a scene. In this case your job is to help the director achieve his/her vision.

In your job as a storyboard artist you have command over shot choice, the number of shots in a scene, how long they last on the screen. This is then enhanced by the editor in the editing process later on after the filming or animating is done. The editor can then plus the narrative and the pacing, but he can only work with what he's given. Wizard editing can only do so much. It can't fix bad staging, composition, lighting, acting, etc.

So not only do you as the chief storyteller have to consider the elements of composition, timing, etc., you have to consider them in every shot and the shots that come before and after in a sequence. No scene stands alone. This is the heart of film and film language.

The reliance and overuse of camera tricks, zooms, pans, trucks, tilts or close-ups and MTV video-type cutting will only weaken and confuse any story narrative, and the viewer.

As the storyboard artist you must always think: What am I trying to show the viewer? Am I trying to scare them, thrill them, make them laugh, cry, or sit on the edge of their seat... hide their eyes?

Your shot choice/composition coupled with timing (number of shots and length on screen) will take the viewer by the eye, grab them by their emotions, and project them out of their seats and into the film. Only use camera movement to enhance the story.

The composition and its complexity is directly tied to editing and screen time. A complex shot, say of some James Bond villain's hideout will require longer screen time, maybe even a pan for the viewer to take it all in. We want the viewer to be impressed at the bad guy's hideout and the millions spent on the set. A shot of a button being pushed can take only a second to read visually as the visual complexity is simpler and the pushing of a button is a simple motion, so the screen time of that shot can be fairly short. A rapid succession of quick cuts in a fight or car chase enhance the momentum and energy, tension of the scene. Long slow tracking shots or pans do the opposite; they give us a feeling of tranquility or awe, depending on what type of landscape we are showing.

Strong compositions, smart shot choices, strong, clear posing of figures, and staging coupled with dynamic editing will make for an exciting film.

THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMICS AND FILM

Both the storyboard and comic artist deal with the passage of time to tell a story. They manipulate time and events and how they

are arranged to tell a story, an event, or a narrative. The comic artist does this through the use of panels and word balloons. The storyboard artist does this through the language of film, which includes motion and sound, but chiefly shot flow and editing, which controls the pace/length (screen time) of the scene or event.

The comic artist, however, is dealing with a much more limited storytelling canvas. He can't rely upon sound, sometimes not even color or motion the way a film director can. The comic artist is dealing with not only all of the same criteria in telling an effective story, but he or she has much less "real estate" in which to do so.

The comic panel and page have only so much physical room. The newspaper comic strip is the most restrictive of all comic storytelling. Outside of the Sunday page, which is typically 2-3 tiers, the daily newspaper strip usually has 3-5 panels at the most to tell the day's joke or story sequence. The smaller size of the modern comic strip also means that a lot of the available space is taken up by the balloons and script, leaving the artist with little room to draw underneath. So economy and clarity is very important in both script and art.

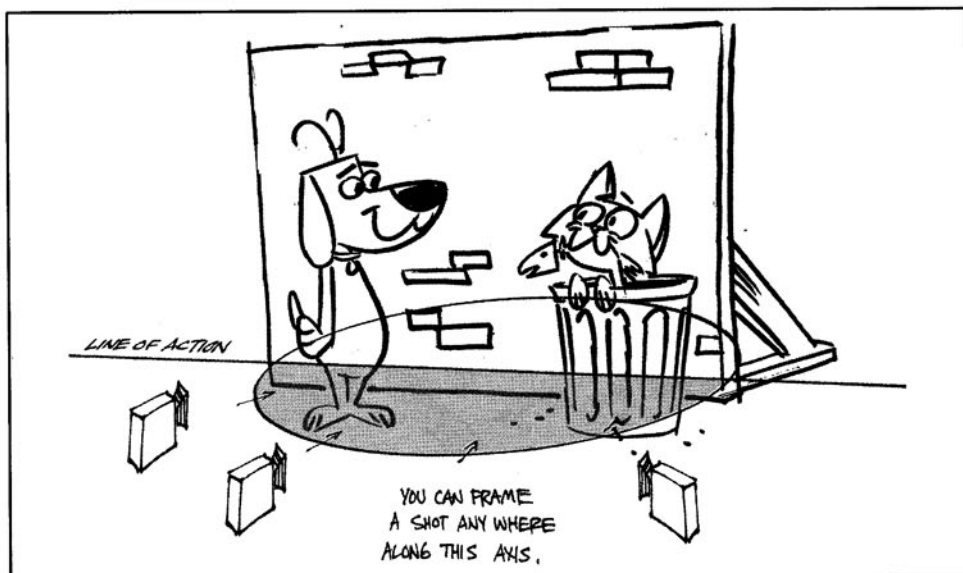
- Film, animation and comics use all of the core foundations of visual art and language: composition, design, gesture, and line of action to direct the eye and create pleasing, clear and exciting visual staging.
- Film and animation are collaborative mediums. It takes the effort of dozens—sometimes a hundred or more—artists to make a single episode of a TV cartoon or an animated feature. Comics can be a more personal, intimate expression. One person can create a comic book or strip.

THE 180 DEGREE RULE

This is probably the most important rule a board artist has to learn in order to keep the staging of people, characters, cars or other objects within a scene, as well as from scene to scene, consistent and thus not confusing the viewer by sudden reversals of position. A helpful way to think of the rule is "what is on the left stays on the left," and "what is on the right stays on the right" of the scene.

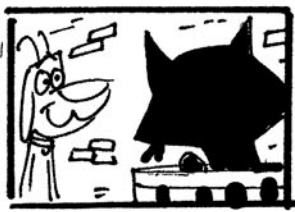
If you take a circle and cut it in half parallel to the horizon, you get two equal halves of 180 degrees. Think of one of the halves (180 degrees) as a stage upon which we shoot our cartoon or movie and stage all the drama and action. Another helpful way to think of this setup is to think of it like one of your favorite TV sitcoms, like *Seinfeld* or *Friends*. We only see one view of Jerry's apartment, essentially only one half. If we violate the 180 degree rule and stage a shot which shoots back across the line of action, we would see the audience and violate the Fourth Wall.

THE 180 DEGREE RULE

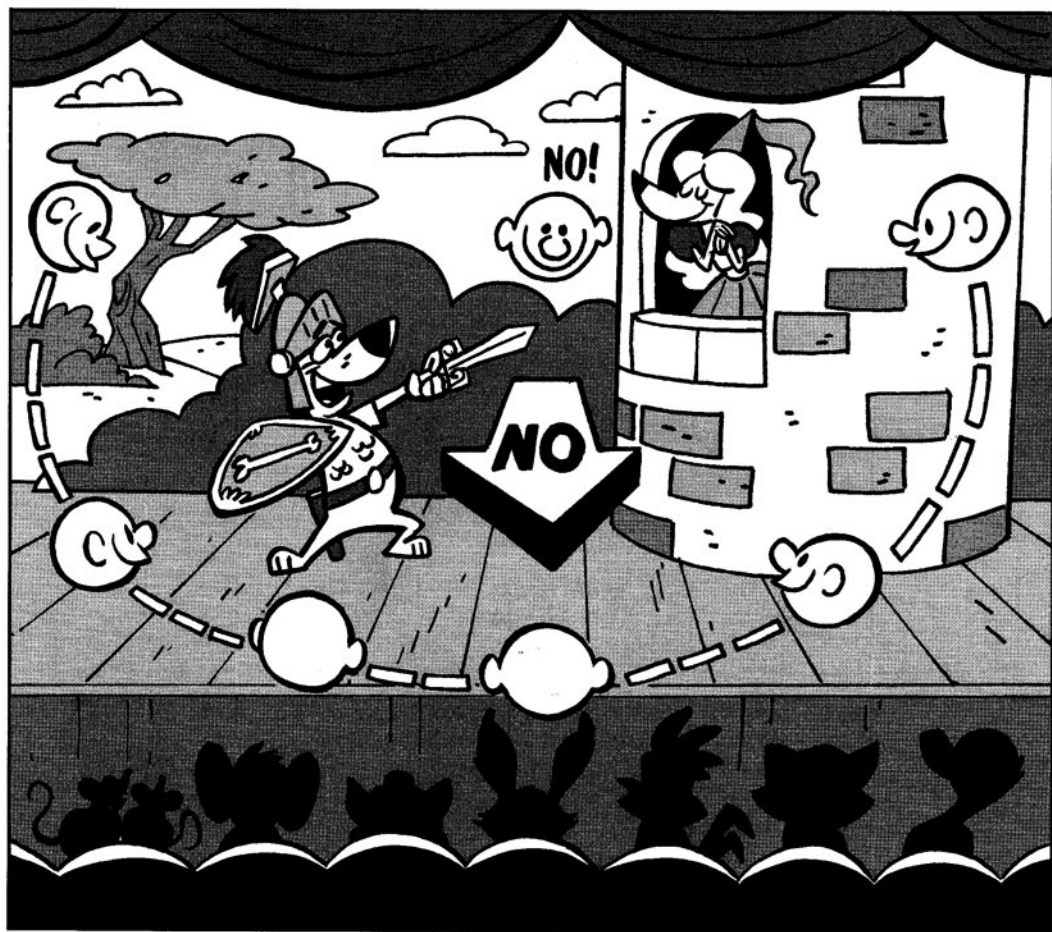


The line of action is an imaginary partition running through the picture space in front of the camera.

ALL OF THESE SHOTS CAN BE COMPOSED OFF OF THE LINE OF ACTION.



The 180 Degree Rule's purpose is to allow for multiple camera angles to be shot in a scene that can be cut/edited together without reversing or confusing what is on the left or right in the scene.



LIKE A STAGE

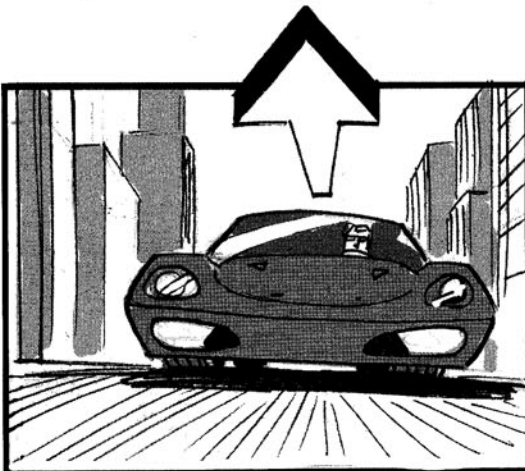
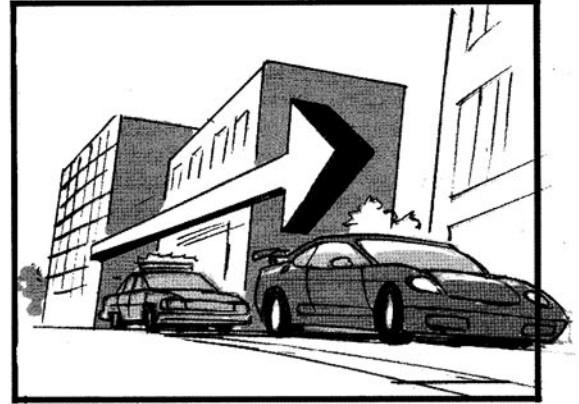
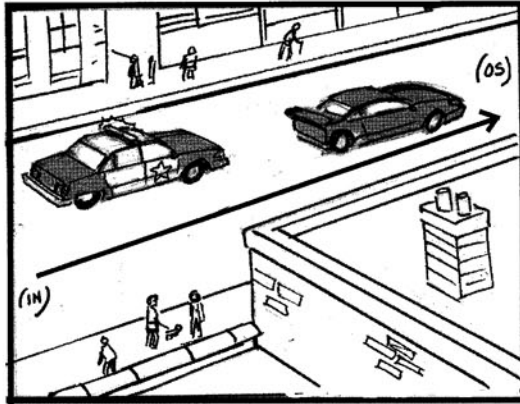
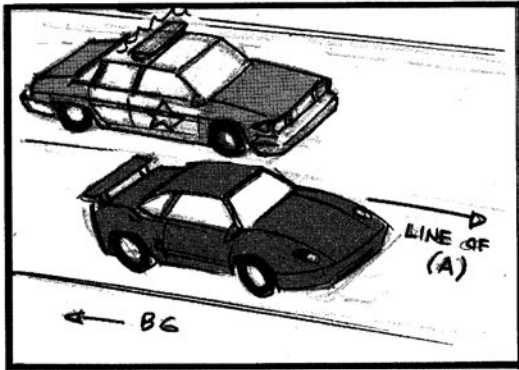
The best way to think of a cartoon when storyboarding is that it is like watching a play. In a play we sit in the audience and watch the action take place on the stage before us, the action usually going from left to right or right to left. We never have the vantage point to sit behind the stage and stare back at the audience. So we essentially have a set with three walls; the fourth wall is the audience, and we never want to break the fourth wall unless it's some special occasion where the character directly addresses the audience.

So when boarding we can place the viewer's POV or the camera anywhere along the stage as long as we don't break the 180 degrees and show the audience.

THE CAR CHASE

The car chase, or any chase, is a staple in cartoons and films of all sorts from *Bullit* and *Star Wars* to the *Road Runner* and *Tom & Jerry* cartoons. Every cartoon seems to have a chase, and what action film wouldn't have one? The chase is usually set up left to right or right to left along a 180 degree line of action, but in order to show the other driver's POV as in the car chase on the next page, we break the 180 Degree Rule only after clearly establishing the left to right line of action and the neutral shot in scene five. This allows us to show the police officer's POV chasing the bad guy. The scene after this would go back to show the cars continuing in a left to right screen direction. This rough board is more of a live action type of set-up but it could be used in an animated film as well. Live action tends to break the 180 Degree Rule more because we can fully move in and out of real space whereas in the standard 2-D film we can't—objects tend to move left, right, toward the camera or away. In the 3-D animated film we can now swoop in and around the characters and environments, but screen direction should be maintained to avoid confusing the audience as to exactly whom is chasing whom and where they are going.

THE CAR CHASE AND THE 180 DEGREE RULE



WITH GREAT DRAWING COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

To quote Stan Lee's most famous line, "With great power comes great responsibility." As the storyteller in comics or as a storyboard artist in animation or film, it's your responsibility to stage the action clearly and concisely.

GREAT BELIEVABLE DRAMA COMES FROM GREAT STAGING

As the storyteller in comics or as a storyboard artist in animation or film, it's your responsibility to stage the action clearly and concisely. There should be nothing left for the reader or viewer to have to struggle to interpret or guess at. There should be no doubt about who the characters are, where the characters are in relationship to each other or other objects from scene to scene, or in comics, panel to panel. This is *vital* important, because this internal logic of continuity defines the world of the characters and settings in the viewer's mind. This is how you the artist make the readers or viewers believe what they are seeing is real. That the characters act and feel and relate to each other and the world you are creating in ways that the viewer can relate to, even if they are monsters or aliens, puppets made of wood or inanimate objects brought magically to life. The viewers must be able to identify with them as real beings with thought and feelings who relate to their environments in much the same way we do, even if it's an alien world or a period drama.

In the case of the comic book or comic strip, it must not only be clear what's going on in every panel, but what happens between the panels, between the events (time/action) that each panel depicts.

There are a few questions you must always ask yourself as a storyteller.


- **Am I staging this action the best way?**
- **Is the story scene or action shown in a way that could even remotely be confusing to the viewer?**
- **Are the gestures clear?**
- **Is this the best shot choice?**
- **Are the relationships between the characters and their spatial relationships within the environment/props consistent?**
- **Is the line of action consistent?**

A simple thing like having the line of sight or eye contact be off between characters will throw the viewer.

Maintaining the internal logic in a story setting is *essential*. If the readers become confused at any point as to what's happening or where the character is, you've lost, you break the rhythm of

reading or viewing. The viewer then has to stop and think to themselves, "What's happened here? What is that? Why is that?" or "Where did he, she or it come from?"

The result will be that the set-up pace at which you are building up your drama—and the payoff—is lost, gone, and you can't recover. Like a poorly set up joke, the punchline loses its power. Every time you fail at one of these essential stages, you weaken the drama and the ability for the viewer to become involved and "lose themselves" in the story. People have an internal logic when watching a movie or reading a comic book. If you confuse them, they fall out of the drama, back into their world, out of the world you created that they were reading or viewing. It makes the story or drama an unsatisfying and confusing experience for the audience.

The final advice I will give you is the advice I was given by directors when I first started storyboarding: Study films and cartoons by the best as well as your own favorites. Like a show, cartoon or movie? Dissect it, pause it, rewatch it, take it apart scene by scene and study how it was done. The composition, acting, the editing, lighting, drawing, staging, etc.; become a real student of film and don't be afraid to steal or copy ideas if they can help you make a better shot or sequence. That's how the best of the best did it; we all start learning at someone's feet, so don't just sit idle, passive. Become a real honest student of film, and that will help you become a better filmmaker. 

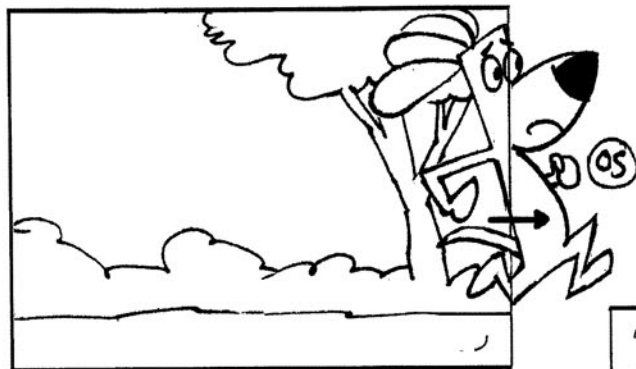
(For more in-depth information on storyboarding, I highly recommend the book Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualizing from Concept to Screen (Michael Wiese Productions) by Steven D. Katz)

SCREEN DIRECTION



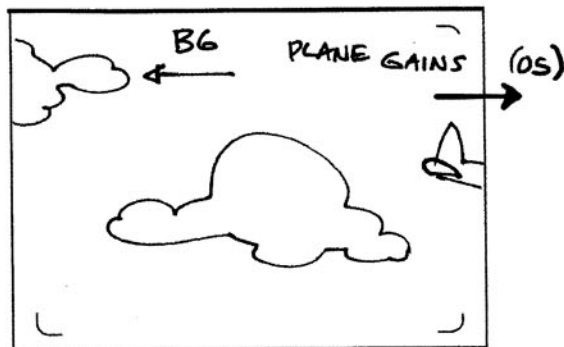
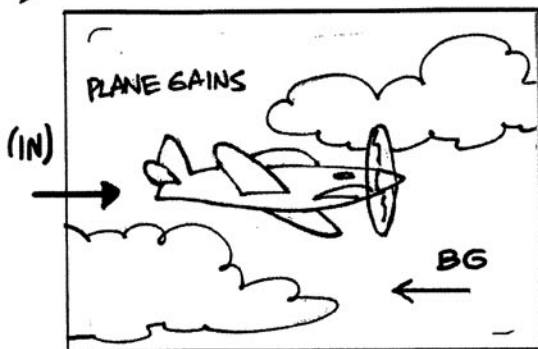
Just like a live action director, **Screen Direction** is what the storyboard artist uses to tell the cameraman, the animator, layout and background artists, and anyone else working on the film or cartoon what animates and how it moves. Screen Direction indicates what is animating, where it is going or what elements are moving, including camera or special effects like dissolves, etc.

(IN) indicates that the object or person is entering INTO the scene. In this case the background is static and doesn't animate.



(OS) indicates that the person or object has exited OUT OF SCENE. The arrows are used to indicate the direction the person or object is traveling.

If the background is animating (usually in a cycle) the person or object **GAINS** into the scene. The direction of the background animating is indicated with an arrow. It's very important that your screen direction be correct or you would end up with either the background or the object or person not animating properly. The rule is if an object or person is moving through a scene and the background is animating also, we indicate that by the screen direction **GAIN**.



As the plane exits the scene it **GAINS (OS)**.

SCREEN DIRECTION: PANS, TRUCKS, ETC.

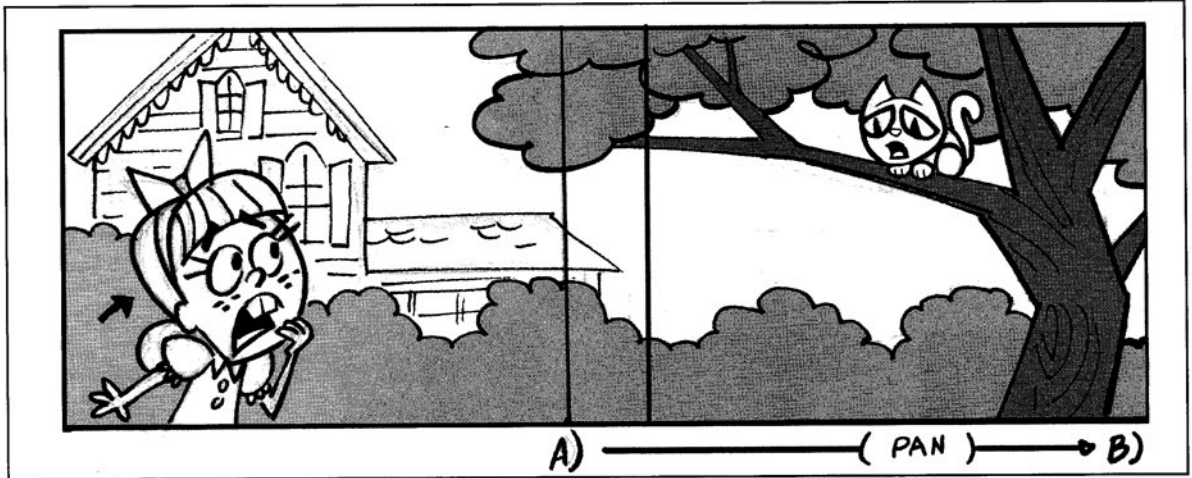


LEFT: A **TRUCK IN** is a camera move where we start with a wider shot and “**TRUCK IN**” to a tighter shot. This is a camera move and the arrow directs the camera man to start on the entire scene and move in to a tight shot of the man on the left.

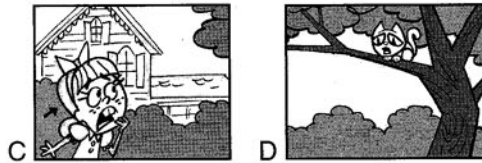
RIGHT: A “**TRUCK OUT**” is the reverse of the **TRUCK IN** as we start in tighter on the woman and **TRUCK OUT** to show Monsterman reacting to something off-screen. The two types of trucks are commonly used and can enhance the drama of a scene, but if overused, it can become gimmicky and seem amateurish.



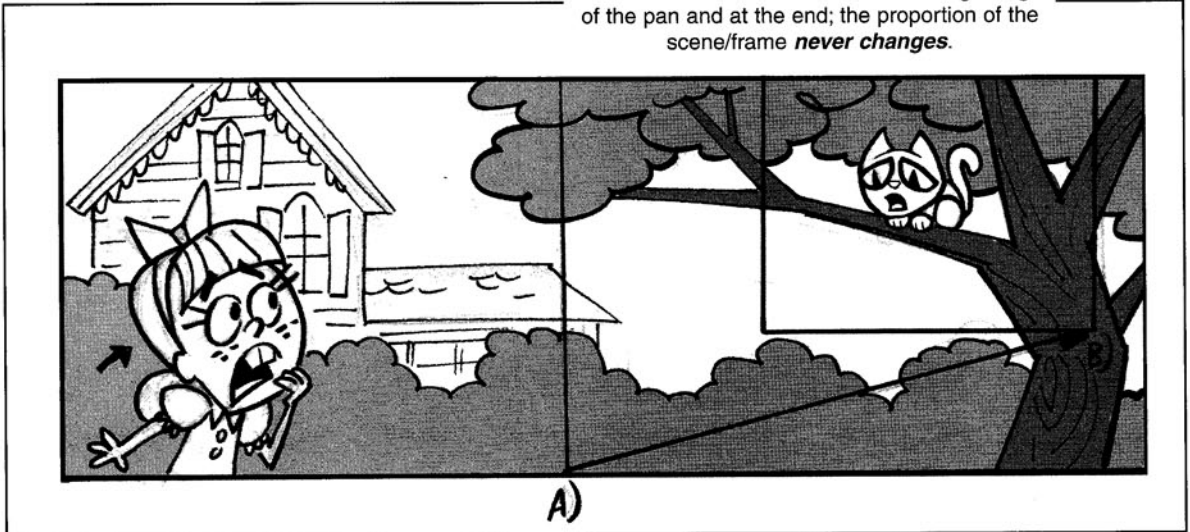
PANS



This is the standard type of pan you'd find in a cartoon where we start with scene (A) and then the camera would **PAN** over to (B). This would be on large piece of background art but the proportion of the scene would remain constant as in figure C and D.

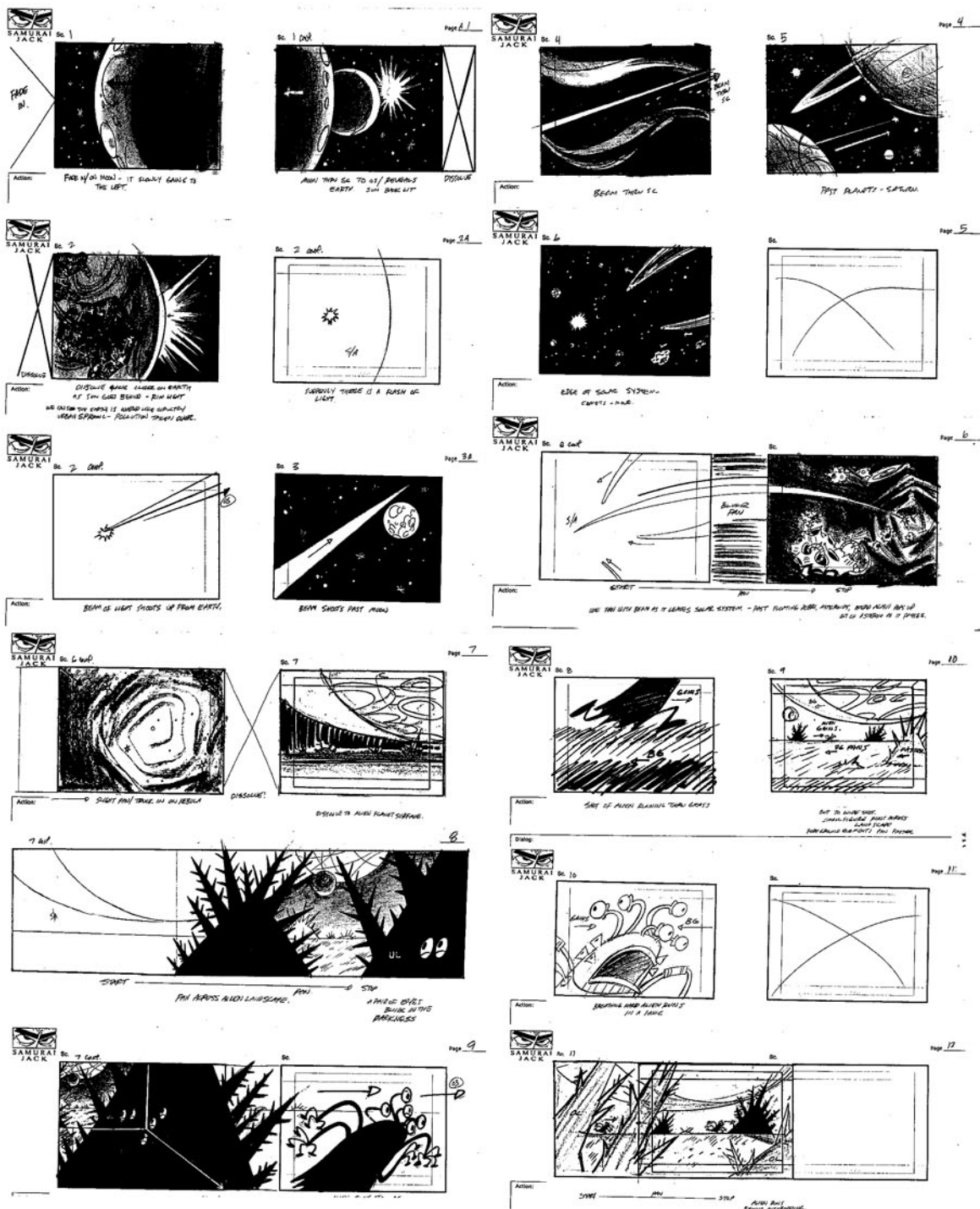


This is what the viewer sees at the beginning of the pan and at the end; the proportion of the scene/frame **never changes**.



You can also combine trucks and pans into one shot. In this case we pan over as well as truck in to the little kitten stuck in the tree.

18 THE BEST OF DRAW!





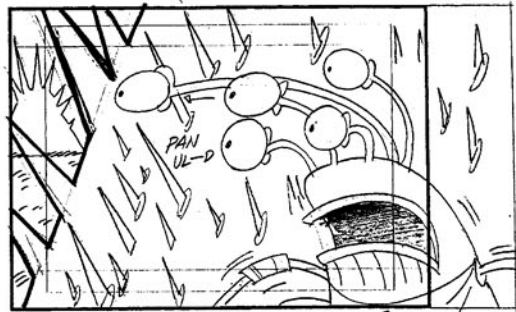
Sc. 12



Action:

ALIEN BREATHING HARD - TREMBLING A LITTLE.

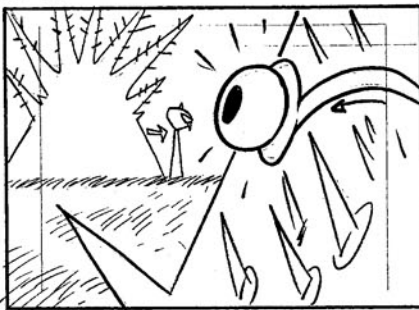
Sc. 13



BUT IN HE STRETCHES HIS EYE STALKS TO TAKE A LOOK. SLIGHT PAN



Sc. 14

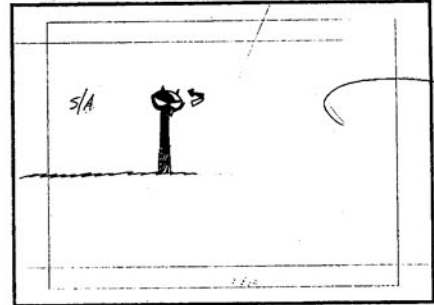


HOOK UP EYE

Action:

'AAAH!' HE SEES ALIEN EMERGE FROM BEHIND ROCK.

Sc. 14 CONT.



EYE TO OS

ALIEN FIGURE TURNS TO LOOK. EYE TO OS FAST, SLIGHTLY BEFORE ALIEN TURNS HEAD



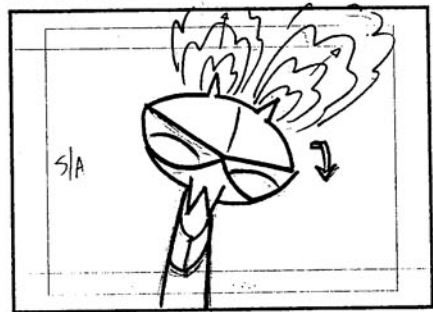
Sc. 15



Action:

CUT IN ON ORACLE. HIS EYES NARROW AS IF HE REALIZES SOMETHING. UNDERSTANDS SOMETHING

Sc. 15 CONT.



HE CONCENTRATES, ANTENNAS ON HIS HEAD FLASH, MENTAL ENERGY COMING OUT.



Sc. 16

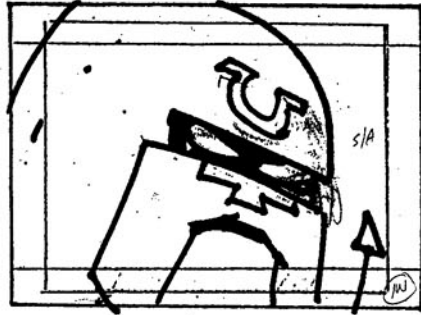


Action:

OUT TO ANOTHER SC -
OUT CROP OF POLES - PLANET IN BG

Sc. 16

CONT.

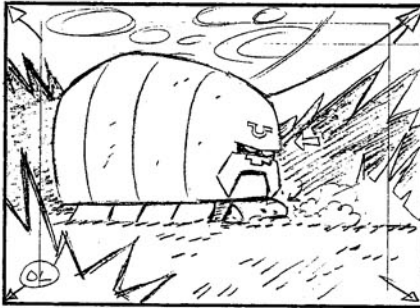


TRACK UP INTO SC

Page 16



Sc. 16 CONT.

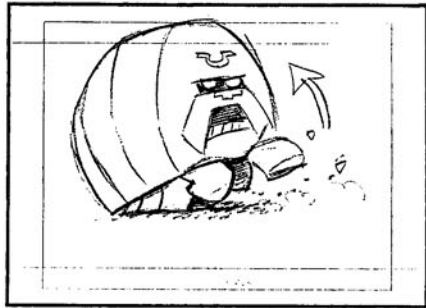


Action:

TRUCK OUT, HE'S SCRATCHING GROUND
STIRRING UP DIRT + DUST - TRYING
TO GET A SENSE.

Sc. 16

CONT.

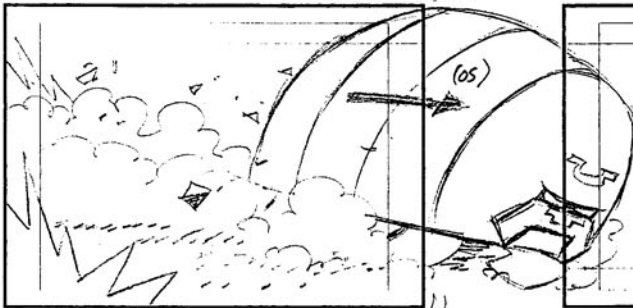


HE REARS UP AND SNORTS

Page 17



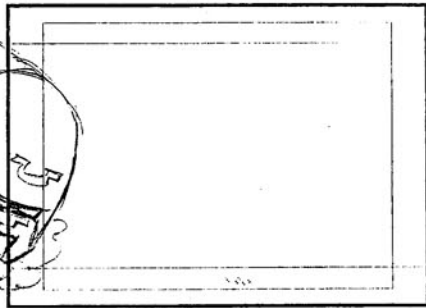
Sc. 16 CONT.



Action:

HE RUNS (OS)

Sc.



Page 18



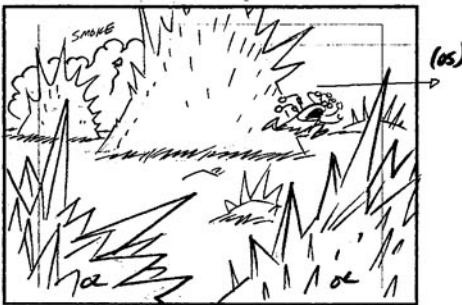
Sc. 17



Action:



Sc. 19

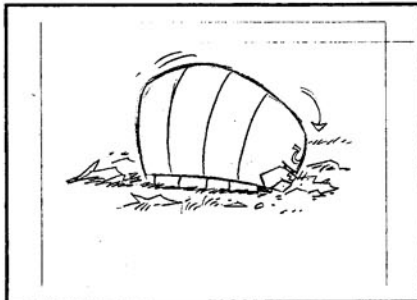


Action:

ALIEN RUNS AS TARRK GETS CLOSER



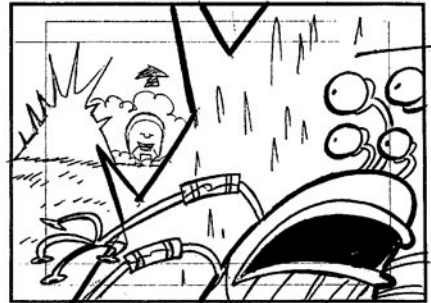
Sc. 19 CONT.



Action:

HE SNIFFS ABOUT.

Sc. 18



TARRK APPROACHES -
ALIEN FLEES TO OS

Page 19

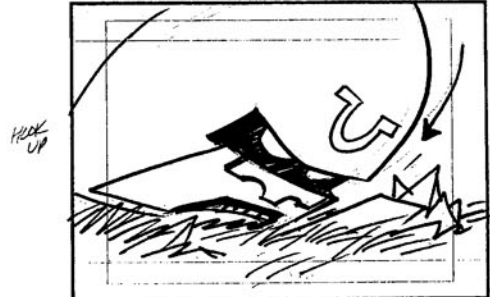
Sc. 19 CONT.



BAM!! HE HITS ROCK TREE
AND DESTROYS IT.

Page 20

Sc. 20

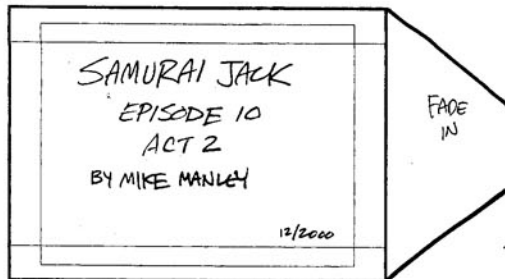


SNIFF AND SNORTS

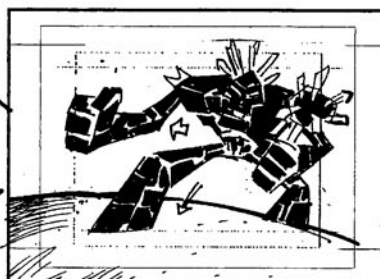
Page 21



Sc.



Sc. 1

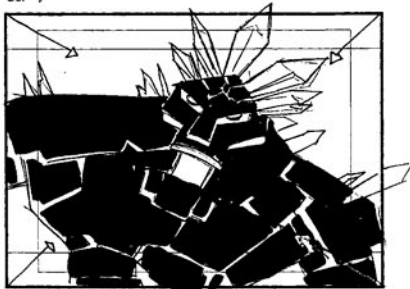


STONE WARRIOR STEPS FORWARD
EYES GLOWING

Action:



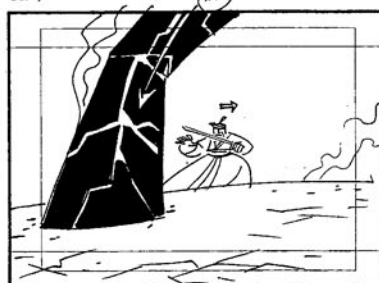
Sc. 2



TRUCK IN AS MONSTER MOVES
FORWARD

Action:

Sc. 3



WARRIOR'S FOOT INTO SC -
JACK MOVES TO THE SIDE

Dialog:

MONSTER -
GROWL



Sc. 4



Action:

Sc. 5



JACK

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS?!
YOU HAVE LURED MANY
VALIANT MEN TO THEIR DEATHS -

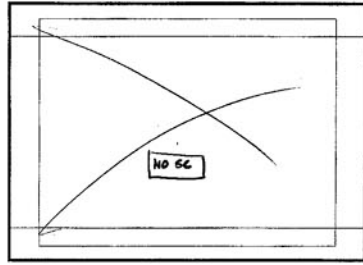
Dialog:

SAMURAI SC. 5
JACK



Action: JACK GAINS SLIGHTLY

Sc.



Dialog:

JACK
WHY?

SAMURAI
JACK

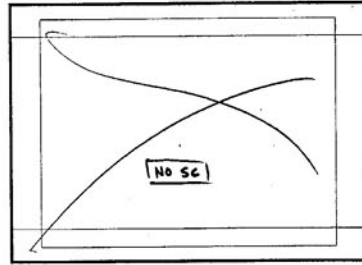


Action:

Dialog:

POCK WARRIOR
LOW LAUGH

Sc.



Page 5

SAMURAI
JACK

Sc.



*PAN AS BG ANIMATES SOUTH

POCK WARRIOR

RAAPLY!!

Page 6

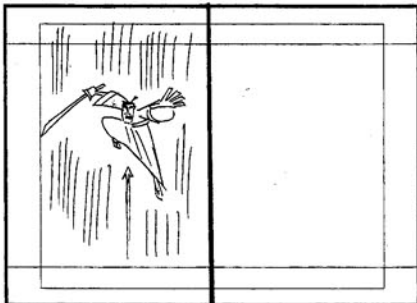


CONTINUE TO PAN UP WITH WARRIOR'S HEAD
* B6 ANIMATES SOUTH

SAMURAI JACK © 2006 CARTOON NETWORK



Sc. 9

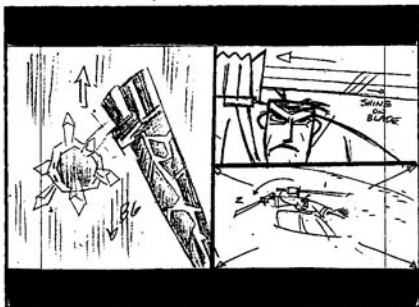


Action:

JACK JUMPS



Sc. 11



Action:

Dialog:

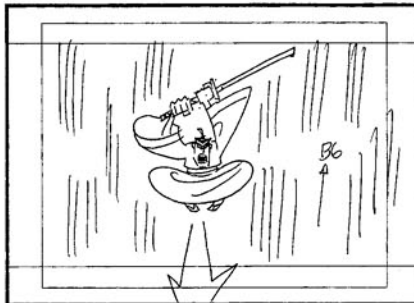


Sc. 13



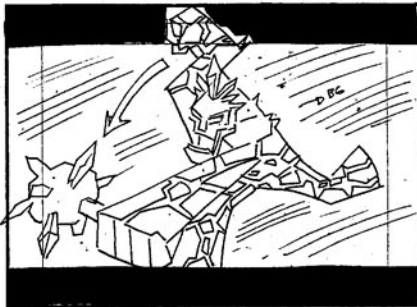
Action:

Sc. 10



COMES AT CAMERA TO OS

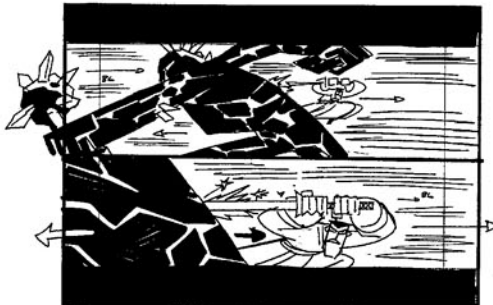
Sc. 12



RED WARRIOR

RAAAA!!

Sc. 14



THEY PASS EACH OTHER -
JACK'S BLADE CUTTING
POGIE. SPARKS
SHOOT OFF.

Page 8

Page 9

Page 10



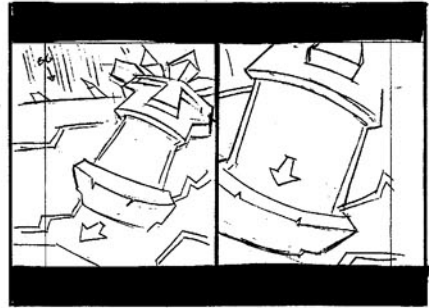
Sc. 15



Action:

REPENT AT - CLOSER - CLOSER

Sc. 16

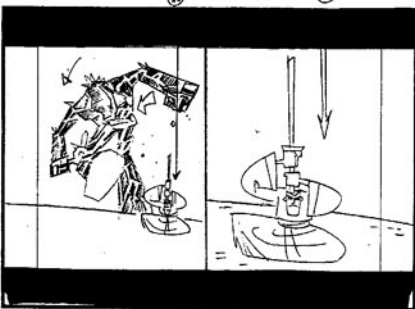


ROCK WARRIOR

YELL'S!



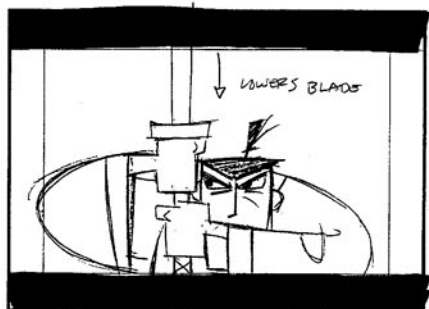
Sc. 17



Action:

ROCK WARRIOR
STUMBLES JACK
LANDS

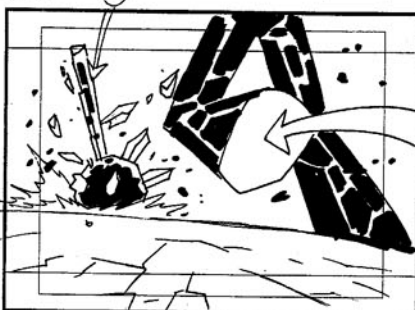
Sc. 18



LOWERS BLADE



Sc. 19



Action:

ROCK WARRIOR STUMBLES
STONE MACE FALLS - BREAKS

This sequence with the fight between Jack and the Rock Warrior was a lot of fun to do and hard work. I was initially given a rough plot by Genndy Tartakovsky and then let loose to actually co-write the episode as I boarded it. This episode was also a tribute to an old issue of *Thor* by Walt Simonson, something most fans might not ever pick up on. Once the rough board was done I sent it to Genndy. He and I went over them over the phone while I made notes on changes and then proceeded to the finish. Another thing to always remember is that animation and film are collaborative mediums and everything is liquid right up until it is sent out to be animated. I boarded the whole show so the final storyboard was well over 500 pages.



DRAWING THE LINE WITH KEVIN NOWLAN

Only a handful of artists in every generation come along and turn heads, grabbing the attention of everyone else working in their medium, and certainly Kevin Nowlan is one of those artists. From his early fan-artist days to his early work for Marvel and DC to his Eisner Award-winning work on "Jack B. Quick" with Alan Moore for *Tomorrow Stories*, Nowlan's lush work has set high standards and influenced many. *Draw!* Editor Mike Manley spent a late spring day interviewing Nowlan from his Kansas home, talking craft and revealing some of this popular artist's work habits and techniques.

DRAW!: Why don't we just start right off in the beginning and have you fill us in on your childhood and your early interest in art and comics.

KEVIN NOWLAN: I was born in Nebraska, raised in Kansas. I'm the youngest of six kids.

DRAW!: What year?

KN: 1958.

DRAW!: Did you grow up reading comics?

KN: Oh yeah. My older brother always had a steady supply.

DRAW!: What years were this and what was your brother into reading?

KN: I'd say around 1963 through 1968. I remember *CARTOONS* magazine and some of those black-and-white horror magazines. Mostly DC comics like *Batman*, *Blackhawk* and some westerns.

DRAW!: What were some of your favorite books and artists?

KN: *Batman*, *Superman*, *Metal Men*, *Teen Titans*, *Archie*. When I was ten I got the first issue of *Angel and the Ape* and it was my favorite book for a long time. Gorillas, Go-Go Girls and Bob Oksner's art... what's not to like?

DRAW!: At what age were you aware of wanting to become an artist?

KN: Very young. Before I started school. My mother used

to try to keep me quiet in church by giving me a pencil and paper. "Here's how to draw a rabbit... first you make two circles, like a snowman."

DRAW!: Was this encouraged at home?

KN: Yes.

DRAW!: So your mom was an artist? Was art something appreciated or done in your home?

KN: No, as far as I know, she just knew how to draw that one thing. My brother, Mike, was a real artist. He drew hotrods, monsters and flying saucers. He did at least one really beautiful oil painting in high school. I used to love to look over his shoulder and watch him draw. He said later that no one ever encouraged him so he didn't stick with it.

But I wasn't drawing because of the encouragement... I drew because I loved it. I would see him drawing, or notice a really cool cover on a DC comic and I would have to scrounge up some paper and draw. I filled up a huge sheet of butcher paper with a scene of Batman and Robin fighting Nazis.

DRAW!: So there was, despite what your brother says, some encouragement at home?

KN: I guess so. I remember comments here and there from my parents and my sisters. They're also pretty creative... although out of the four of them, only one ever put any serious effort into drawing and painting.

DRAW!: Did you have any formal art education or attend any art schools? What did you do there?

KN: Yeah, but I didn't really learn anything that relates to working in comics. I feel like I really just figured out a lot of this stuff on my own. I didn't know anyone who could teach me how to draw a figure or what tools to use for inking. I just assumed I'd have to teach myself all of that stuff. I learned some basic information about printing because of a part time job I stumbled into. When I was 12, I started working at the local weekly newspaper as a "printer's devil." In the old days, that meant that you were an apprentice. In 1970 it meant that I swept the floor and could help myself to all the paper scraps that I wanted. They were still using the old sheet-fed letterpress with lead type. The place really looked like it had been frozen in time since 1890. If you've ever seen one of the old Linotype machines, you know what I mean. After the paper was printed, I would gather up the type, melt it down and pour it into long lead bars called "pigs." They hung on the



NOWLAN: This is me trying to be a "serious" comic book artist. Lots of little lines and textures.

Linotype machine and were gradually melted to make the new "lines-of-type." Once this had been state-of-the-art technology, but by the 1970s it was almost completely obsolete. I was able to see all of this just before it vanished from the face of the earth.

DRAW!: Wow, that's great. Another one of the things you do well and are noted for is your lettering and logo design, like

Hellboy. Would you say that doing this old fashioned hands on work with type gave you a skill and appreciation for lettering and calligraphy?

KN: Maybe... but I think I already had some appreciation for the lettering in comics. I didn't know his name at the time, but I was crazy about Gaspar Saladino's work at DC. Toth would often do his own lettering and I had a strong preference for those stories. I always wanted to figure out how to do my own lettering and I practiced it quite a bit... especially as I got older.

To finally answer your question: After I graduated from high school I took a two-year course in commercial art at a local trade school. But the instructors kept saying that there weren't any illustration jobs out there anymore so they wanted us to focus on design: logos, letterheads, advertising stuff.

DRAW!: I assume this was back before computers took over all the layout and mechanical work like key-lining, etc.?

KN: Yes. For some of those *Comics Journal* covers I drew, I did my own "hand separations." The line art had three overlays with black zip-a-tone tints to create the colors. Now it seems unbelievably crude, but at the time, it was almost magical. You would be working in black and white and wouldn't see the color until it was printed.

DRAW!: When did you start working in comics, do your first story?

KN: I drew my first story at Marvel in 1982. It was literally the first story I'd ever drawn.

DRAW!: So you never drew your own stories or comics before you worked professionally? There are no comics you made up with your own heroes, etc.?

KN: I tried doing some of those, but I never did more than a few pages. I was just chomping at the bit to draw a story, and



NOWLAN: Can you tell I enjoy doing my own lettering? Sometimes it's the most enjoyable part of the job. This was an ad section for *Details* magazine.

after I penciled a little of it I'd realize that I really didn't know what I was doing.

DRAW!: Did you continue to do commercial art early in your career during the time you started in comics.

KN: No, not after I started in comics. I've done lettering and logos, but no commercial art since 1982... unless you count the



stuff in *Details* magazine a few years ago. They were product advertisements that were worked into a comic story. It was nice to get some Madison Avenue money for a change.

DRAW!: When you began trying to get work did you do the con circuit, carrying your portfolio around?

KN: No. I never did that. I was hired without really meeting anyone. Terry Austin took some samples up to Marvel and they gave me an issue of *Dr. Strange* to pencil. I wasn't really ready, but they gave me the job anyway. The drawings weren't very good, but at the time, I was getting very serious about improving my work and there's probably no faster way to learn than being handed a script and told to have 22 pages finished in 30 days.

DRAW!: How did you come to meet up with Austin?

KN: I've never actually met him. He wrote a nice note to me when he saw one of the spot illustrations I did for the *Comics Journal*. It showed up out of the blue and I was stunned. He volunteered to show samples of my work to some Marvel editors.

DRAW!: I became aware of your work when you were doing illustrations and covers for magazines like *Amazing Heroes* and other Fantagraphics publications. Was this your first published work?

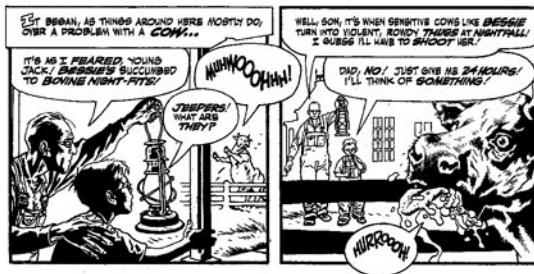
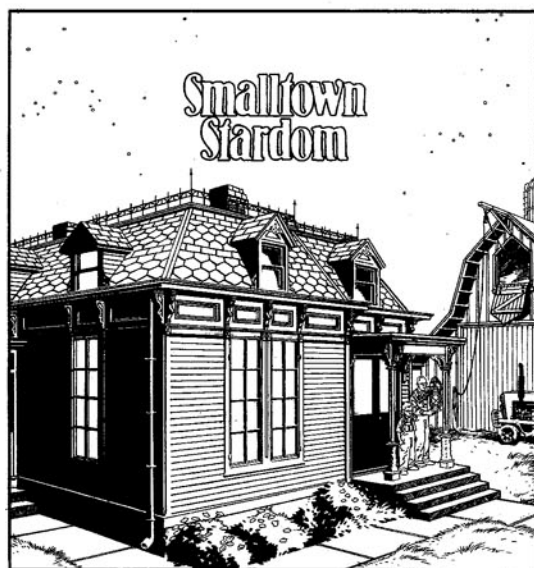
KN: Yes.

DRAW!: How did you end up getting work from them?

KN: I just sent them some drawings and they printed them.

DRAW!: I seem to remember your style being sort of more open and simpler then. I think I am specifically remembering a *Star Wars* drawing, a cover for *Amazing Heroes* I believe that was really nice. Later I remember some of your Marvel work, specifically on *Moon Knight*, which was more detailed like the *Batman* and the *Outsiders* issue you did for DC. It seemed your style was really evolving constantly.

KN: I've always been fond of rendering, but I'm also suspicious



NOWLAN: (Far left) This is a very old photo of the house we've lived in since 1997. It was built around 1891. For me, it was the perfect model for the Quick family home... and it's handy. We don't really have a barn, but our neighbor does.



NOWLAN: (Far left) Mike Bair's layout.

LEFT: My finished pencils.

BELOW: My inks. I tried to add some realistic lighting to the piece, but you can get yourself into a jam if you try to be too literal. The shadows are just there for mood and to create the illusion of reality. You can overthink them. Secondary light sources can help define the form and keep you from losing the shape in too many shadows.

of it. From time to time I've tried to pare down my work and keep the drawings clean and simple so that I'm not hiding bad construction with fancy linework.

DRAW!: So there was a feeling on your part that simpler was better? Were you studying any one artist or school of art that gave you this opinion, say like studying the work of Alex Toth?

KN: I was always fascinated by Toth's work. He makes it look so easy. I also think his stories are very accessible because of his focus on clarity and storytelling. As much as I love rendering, I know at an early age I was studying his approach and thinking, "This is it. This is the guy who has it all figured out."

DRAW!: Did you feel certain types of stories were better handled with a cleaner line and less rendering? An example would be the *Secret Origins* "Man-Bat" story you drew, which was sort of a high contrast approach with strong outlines and shapes and less rendering or traditional turning of form.

KN: Yes, but I don't know how much I really think about that before I start a story. "Man-Bat" was done with very little rendering because of the tight deadline. I had Frank Robbins' work in mind, even though the original story was drawn by Neal Adams. It seemed like a good opportunity for trying a different approach. I tried every shortcut I could think of.

DRAW!: As a result of doing this, did a "light bulb" go off, was this a breakthrough at all in learning what's important artistically? I know often breakthroughs artistically can result from pressure to solve a problem on a deadline.



DRAW!: Were you altering your style and techniques as you saw your jobs printed?

KN: Yes. When I first saw some of my stuff printed on newsprint, it looked too light, so I started to add more blacks and heavy up the lines a little.

DRAW!: Can you better describe this?

KN: The fine lines were dropping out and the color was overwhelming the line work. The pages with more solid black on them seemed to look better.

DRAW!: Did you experiment with your approach by working in sketchbooks, etc.?

KN: No, I've never really kept a sketchbook. I know I should, but I don't.

DRAW!: What were you using at that time as far as drawing instruments?

KN: I drew with a 2, 3 or 4H pencil, and inked with a Hunt #102.



SUPERMAN, LOGO AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS

NOWLAN: This is the degree of finish on an average cover for me. Some areas are worked out carefully, others are left sketchy so I can finish them when I do the inking.

KN: Yes, but I'd been thinking along those lines already, so it wasn't a "light bulb" experience. My tendency to jump to the final stages of a drawing too early would trip me up and I'd be trying to fix a badly structured drawing with "virtuoso inking." I eventually figured out what was wrong and started to think more about the construction and let the surface details take care of themselves.

DRAW!: Who were your major influences as an artist coming up?

KN: Dan DeCarlo, Neal Adams, Ross Andru, Russ Heath, Bob Oksner, Alan Weiss, Wrightson, Barry Smith, Jeff Jones, Kaluta, Frazetta, Toth, Gil Kane, Wally Wood, Joe Kubert.

DRAW!: Are they still influences today?

KN: Sure!

DRAW!: Who do you look at for inspiration now?

KN: Now you'd have to add Mignola to the list. Not very many other current guys. I'm stuck in the past.

DRAW!: A Hunt #102 Crow Quill pen point?

KN: Yes.

DRAW!: Were you working directly on the board or would you do layouts and transfer them with a projector or lightbox? Have you altered your approach since then?

KN: I almost always did small layouts and then used the Artograph to project them onto the board. Lately I've been enlarging the sketches and lightboxing them.

DRAW!: You mentioned in one of our previous conversations that Al Milgrom, an artist and former editor for Marvel, gave you some very good advice early on in your career. Can you tell us about that?

KN: He suggested that I focus on quality instead of quantity. He said that the guys who only worry about speed have trouble finding work when times get tough.

DRAW!: So as a result did you become more picky about the jobs you took? I don't seem to recall you doing any long stints on a monthly book or having other artists ink your work.

KN: No, not since those few issues of *Moon Knight*.

DRAW!: Let's get down to the nuts and bolts of techniques and working. I would say that you are one of the very few—less than a handful of artists in the last 25 years that has really had an almost universal effect on many of your fellow professionals. I'd say it's Golden, Mignola, Lee, and you. I know so many artists who really dig what you do. I'm talking mainstream now. I see many top guys borrowing riffs from you artistically. Like jazz players borrowing riffs from Monk, Coltrane, etc. I find comics very interesting in this respect. They lift riffs, a way of double-lighting a face, a body, a way of adding a certain trick to an ink line, double-cross shading, etc., a way of building up faces or figures will spread out across many artists. I see it all the time. I see bits of Kevin Nowlan all over the place. You must see it yourself. How does that feel?

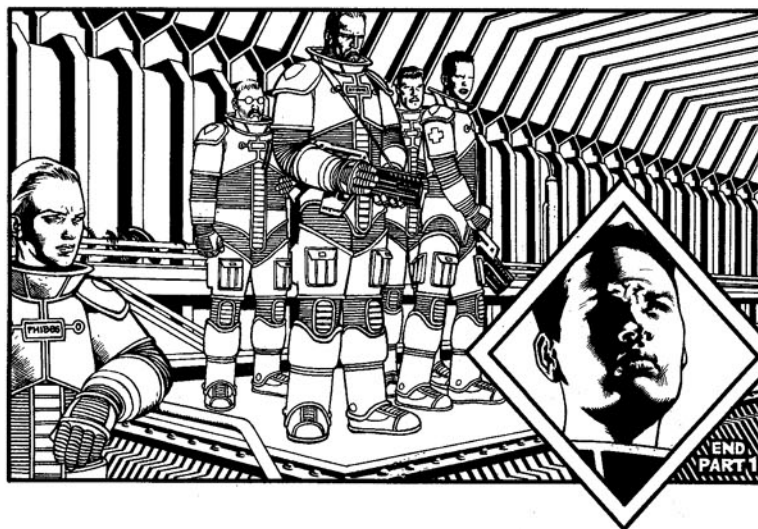
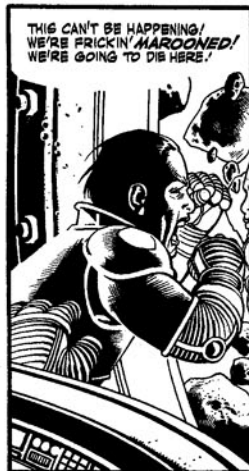
KN: I don't see it. When people point out really specific examples of someone that they think is borrowing from me, I try to see it, but I usually can't. Unless it's a direct swipe.

DRAW!: Do you have any theories on this yourself? It seems to me that you are drawing influence not from the current artists so much as the rich past of comic art and artists.

KN: The older stuff just appeals to me more than most of the newer work.

DRAW!: Now on penciling, like with these DC covers you have done recently, and with the "Jack B. Quick" stories, you seem to do your pencils tight, but not "nail" tight. You leave a lot to be drawn in the ink. Where do you begin? Describe as best you can your working methods.





NOWLAN: (Above left) A false start. The entire story was supposed to be seen from the point of view of the characters. I had to redraw panel four and change the shape of panel five. Not the easiest talking heads I ever did, but it was an interesting project. From *Aliens: Havoc* #1.

KN: I always start with a thumbnail sketch. It's usually just a couple of inches tall. Then I do a larger sketch at around 5" x 7" and firm up the details. I enlarge it and lightbox it onto the 11" x 17" bristol. I used to use an Art-o-graph projector, but I'm more comfortable with the lightbox now. On a story, I always pencil (and sometimes even ink) the lettering first. Then I know exactly how much space is left for the figures and background.

I sketch the layout in very lightly first, concentrating on the big shapes first and the overall movement and attitude. Next I work out the smaller details and the shadows and large areas of black are determined last.

DRAW!: Do you do faces first, work in pen first, then brush, or is it more organic?

KN: I start with faces sometimes. If I can find a good, black ink to use with a brush, I'll start by inking some of the large black areas first.

DRAW!: Do you move around the drawing inking what interests you?

KN: I ink the stuff that's worked out first and leave unresolved areas for last. I often go back and forth between inking and penciling... which is probably a bad idea, but it keeps things moving. I'll ink a figure and then go back and finish penciling the background.

DRAW!: Are you still using the same pens and brushes? What ink do you use?

KN: Yes. I've never found a pen that I like better than the Hunt #102. Brushes are always a problem... but when I can find them, I use the #3 and #4 Raphael

sable or Windsor/ Newtons. I'll use whatever ink I can get my hands on, Pelikan or Black Magic. I'm not good at this advice. Every inker I've talked to knows more about this stuff than I do.

DRAW!: Hmm. I doubt that's true. It seems every single artist I have interviewed for *DRAW!* expresses the same conviction, which I actually find a bit funny. Do you consult reference for anatomy, shoot photos, etc., to get lighting or in general use much "swipe" in your work?



NOWLAN: (Left) Layouts with very few details. By the time I got to this "Jack B. Quick" story, I was getting away from the photo reference and drawing out of my head much more than I did in the first story. I'm trying to put the emphasis on personality and gesture and worrying a little less about "realism."

BELOW: The half-finished pencils for page one.

KN: After years of thinking that reference was somehow "cheating," I'm getting better at using it when needed and knowing when it's better to just make stuff up. You have to draw from life, whether it's from a mirror, a photo or a live model. You need to learn how things really look before you can turn them into a stylization. I always clip photos that show strong lighting on a face or a figure. When I started drawing "Jack B. Quick," I had my son pose in overalls, my work boots and his sister's glasses and took a bunch of Polaroids. I didn't do that on the later stories but it really helped me to get a feeling for the look of the character at the beginning. I research "props" more now than I did when I was first starting to draw comics.

DRAW!: Your work always has a nice sense of design, balance, well spotted blacks as well as a sense of air and good use of negative space. Is this something you strive for?

KN: Not consciously. I work very viscerally... which is why so much of my drawings look weird. If it looks right to me at the time, I'll go with it.

DRAW!: Can you give us a breakdown of how you work with Alan Moore on "Jack B. Quick." Do you do thumbnails or roughs and send those off, first?

KN: No... I do thumbnails, but not for every panel of every page. Alan doesn't see the work until it's finished, unless Scott Dunbier is sending him copies of the pencils. I never really thought about that. In the past, I've sent layouts to the writers,





NOWLAN: Alan Moore suggested "Alfalpa" from the *Little Rascals* as a general type for Teddy. I started with that, but gave him smaller eyes and a bit of a snarl. My brother laughed out loud when he saw this splash. Who can forget the smell of sun-roasted insects?



but I've gotten away from that. If there were some questions about staging or something I might do it with Alan, but I never got the sense that he wanted or needed to see layouts.

DRAW!: What do you do when you have those days when you hit a slump, or hit a wall in drawing?

KN: I usually just go read an old comic and get inspired all over again. I've never looked at a Toth or a Bob Oksner story without feeling like I wanted to draw some more pictures.

DRAW!: And lastly, do you have anything else to add that you think the aspiring artist, some of our younger readers out there, could benefit from? Something you learned the hard way?

KN: My biggest breakthrough was when I learned how much stuff in comics and illustration isn't made up, it's drawn from reference material. I had it in my head that you just had to draw everything from your imagination or memory. But if you want a little realistic lighting or authentic props, you have to do research and dig up photos. However, it's a double-edged sword... the photos can have too much influence over the work. The best way I know to avoid this problem is to do the layouts and work out the storytelling first. Then, you know how much referencing you need to do. There are many times when I look all over for a certain reference photo and finally realize that the image in my head will work even better. To me, the most effective comic art incorporates the exaggeration and clarity of cartooning with the lighting and naturalism of classic illustration. But you need to work on both disciplines and combining them is the trick. Too much of either one seems to weaken the work but the right blend is really magical.



BATGIRL, JOKER, ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK TM & © 2006 DC COMICS





NOWLAN: Some people would probably disagree, but I think a piece like this would be weakened by photo reference. This stuff works better when it's made up. I liked the crosshatching that came out of penciling in the shadows on the brick wall so I tried to preserve them in the inks. Originally they were just going to be solid black.

NOWLAN: (left) The wonkiness of this cover comes from doing a fairly exaggerated, almost cartoony, rough layout and then finishing it with more naturalistic details.



BATGIRL & ARTWORK TM & © 2006 DC COMICS



BATGIRL & ARTWORK TM & © 2006 DC COMICS



BATGIRL & ARTWORK TM & © 2006 DC COMICS

NOWLAN: Sketch, pencils and finished painting. Photo reference would have helped this one. You can tell I was a little out of my league here. The sketch works fine as a line drawing, but each step seems to get a little weaker. I don't know enough about anatomy to pull off this much faking. I took some polaroids for the meter and conduits on the wall, but I should have used a real model or found some scrap for the figure as well.

Here's how I did the painting: I started out by coating one side of a sheet of 1/8" masonite with gesso. When it was dry, I used the art-o-graph projector to trace my sketch onto the masonite. I finished the pencils on the gesso surface and put in almost all of the gray values. With all the lights and darks worked out, the painting can be finished very quickly from this stage on. The trick is slowing down and resisting the urge to jump in and start painting before the values are all worked out in graphite. Next, I started putting in the basic colors with watered-down acrylic in an airbrush. If you keep it light, the graphite drawing still shows through and before you know it, the painting is nearly finished. Painting the hard edges and details with a sable brush is fairly easy from this point on. As I work from dark to light, the paint gets thicker and more opaque.

THE HULK TM AND © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.



BATGIRL & ARTWORK TM © 2006 DC COMICS

NOWLAN: (Above) A Hulk preliminary drawing. This was part of the Ang Lee audition. Some day I'll tell that story.

ABOVE RIGHT: Pencils for the pin-up at right. I used a huge brush to ink this one. A few details were finished with a Hunt #102 quill pen.



BATGIRL AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



NOWLAN: (Left) Rough layout for the Superman Gallery cover. I tried to come up with some different mechanisms for the robots by researching prosthetics. When you get into an unfamiliar area, like this was for me, doing some research always pays off.

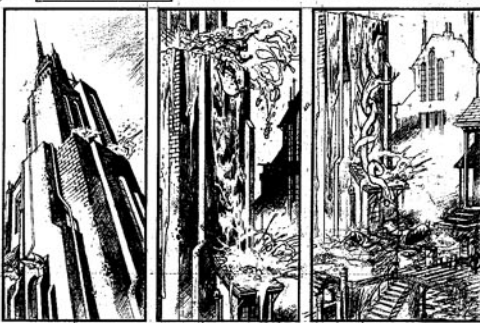
SUPERMAN, ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



BATMAN AND ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



BRATMAN AND ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



Instructions for Two Pass Spread



Copyright © 1992 by Corcoran Inc. All rights reserved. Lincoln and Corcoran's may not be reproduced without the permission of the copyright owner.

BATMAN AND ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS

BATMAN AND ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS

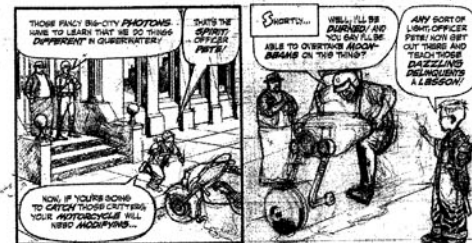
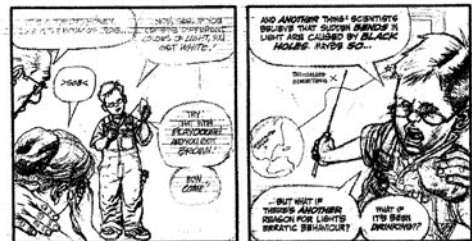
NOWLAN: (Left) Layout and pencils for Batman Black and White: "Monsters in the Closet." You can tell how nervous I was by the tight rendering in the wrinkles... on the layout!

BELOW LEFT: Inked pages from "The Secret Origin of Man-Bat." Minimal rendering, but lots of shadows.

RIGHT: Layout for "JBQ." I changed my mind about the layout for panel three and Officer Pete's headgear. Panel three looked too much like panel five so I reversed the angle. Pete's helmet looked too modern. The old photos I found of motorcycle cops didn't have them, so I went with the cloth hat.

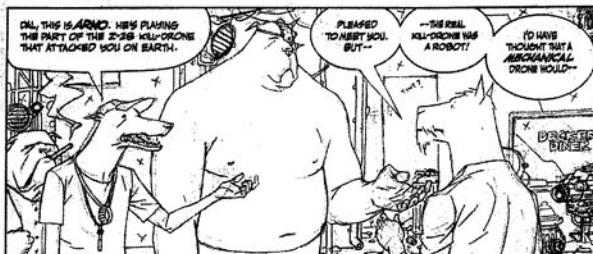


LEFT: LUMINOUS EFFECT
RIGHT: LUMINOUS EFFECT
TITLE: JBQ
ISSUE: MONTH: 10
PAGE: 2





These are pencils from Dalgoda: "The Hero of the Tale." No rendering... a self-imposed limitation that seemed to work. The dogs were surprisingly good actors.



DALGODA TM AND © 2006 STRAND AND FLUTAKE



NOWLAN: Someday DC will get around to publishing this 22-page story that I inked over Wrightson. It's been sitting on a shelf for years. I think I got my love of rendering and shadows directly from studying Bernie's work as a kid. This job was just fanboy heaven for me.



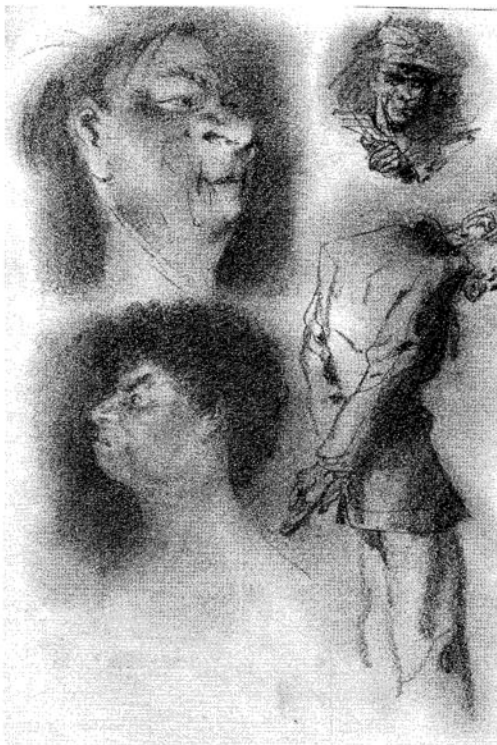
Often, an artist's best and most private work is kept in their sketchbook. Away from the editor's blue pencil, away from the restrictions of time, reproduction and the like. There is something freeing about a sheet of loose paper, a place as vast or as casual as the artist desires. A place to scribble down whatever sparks the imagination. Since the first issue of Draw!, readers have been asking to see more works from Mr. Blevins. And we are more than happy to comply. So enjoy the pages from Bret's sketchbook to kick off our new regular Draw! feature called...

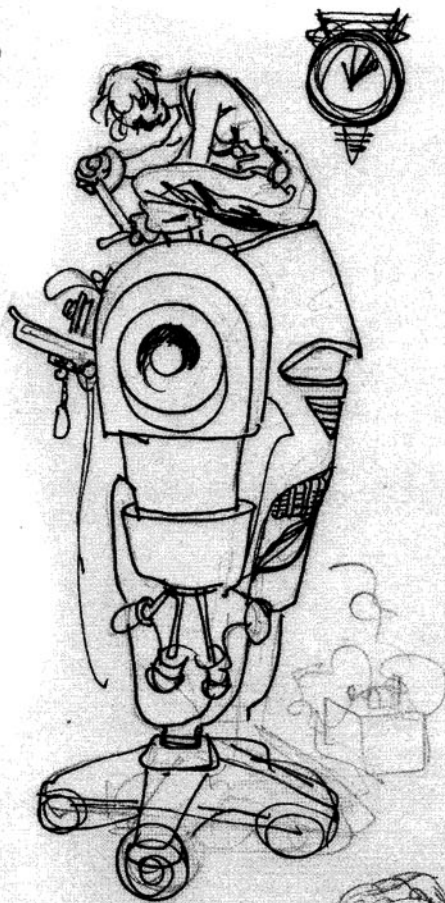
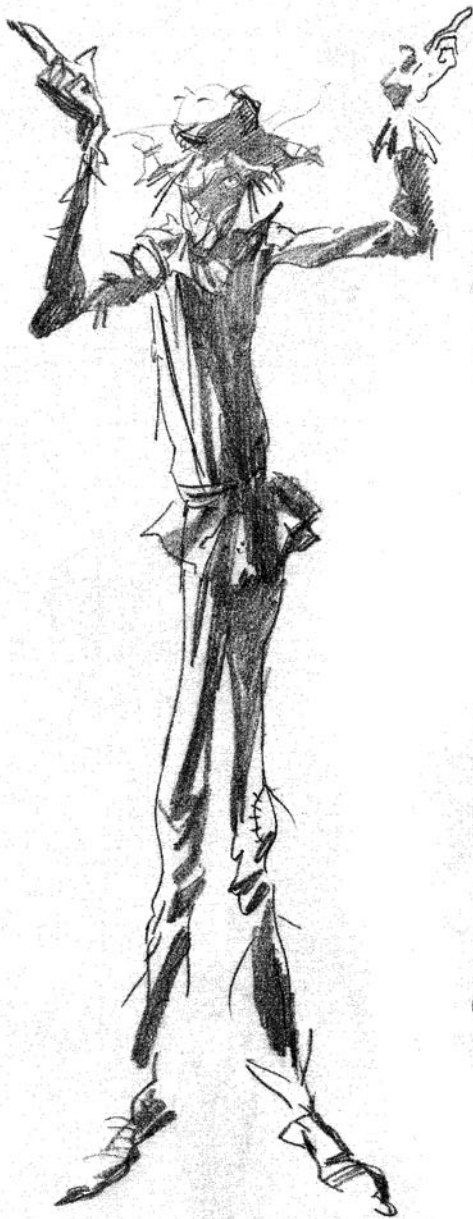
SKETCHBOOK

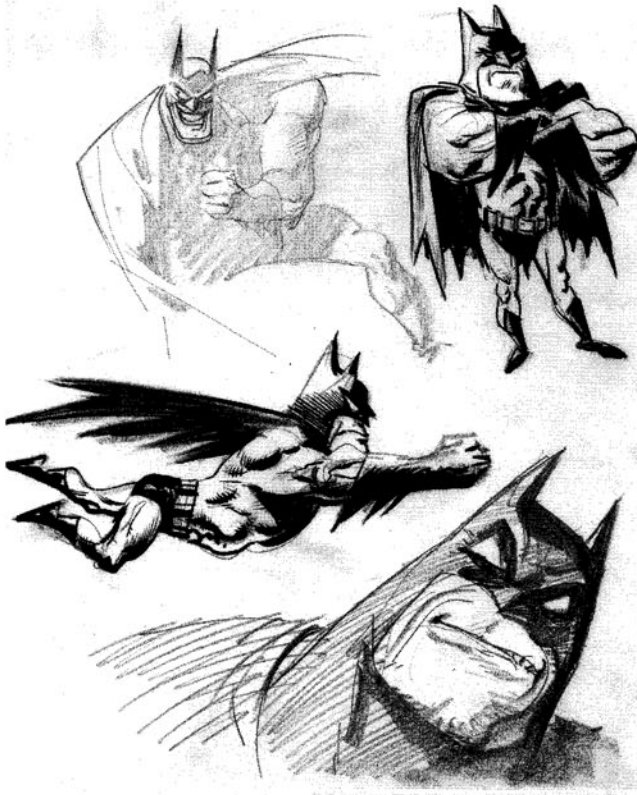
© 2006 BRET BLEVINS



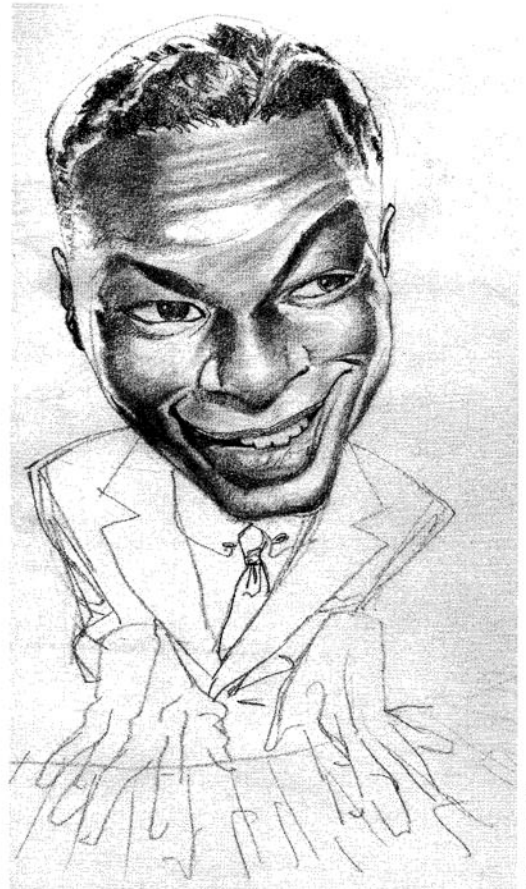
9-31-2000







BATMAN TM AND © 2006 DC COMICS



© 2006 BRETT BLEVINS



DRAW!

COLOR SECTION



RIVOCHÉ

digital coloring technique

by dave cooper, ©2006

coloring a pen & ink drawing

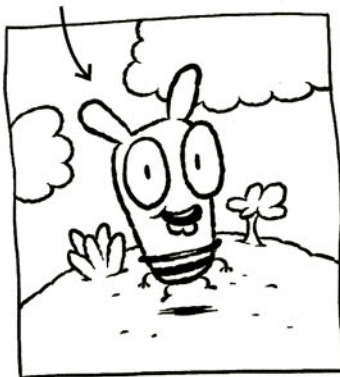
I'm often asked by friends & colleagues if I could give them some tips on coloring in **Photoshop**. And I always have to say that although I love to share tricks, & although I've developed a wonderfully intuitive method, it's way too complex to describe over the phone & it would take way too long to write out. So when Mike asked me to write a "how to" piece for **Draw!**, I saw it as an opportunity to finally get it all down on paper. I hope it will be helpful to you. Like any art tool, there are many ways to use Photoshop, these are just a few.

A warning: this piece is not intended for the absolute novice. In the interest of brevity I'm assuming a lot of basic knowledge on the part of the reader. There are plenty of good resources where you can find out the basics, I'm just going to tell you some of the tricks that I think are somewhat particular to my technique.

Another warning: this piece is also not intended for the casual reader. I'm not even going to attempt to make it clever or witty. It's just plain *instructions*. For entertainment, may I direct you to www.davegraphics.com? (nice plug, huh?)

Now, let's begin *shall we*?

I'm going to use this very simple drawing for the tutorial.



It has a foreground and a background, all drawn with black ink on paper. My digital tools are the following: a sweet Mac G3 blue & white Tower; **Photoshop 5** (ooh, *old school*); an 8½" x 6" **Wacom Tablet** (do yourself a favour & get one if

you haven't already); an unremarkable old **Umax** scanner.

scanning

Scan your artwork at the Lineart setting, at 800 dpi. Once the scan is done, **Save A Copy**. Call it "scan." Now save the document you're actually **WORKING** on. Call it "in progress." This version will be the one you're always working on.

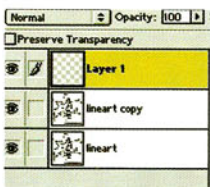
Now convert your document to Grayscale, 300 dpi. **Save A Copy** again, calling it "grey."

(In fact, save a copy at every major stage. Then if you make a mistake, you can always go back. Or if you ever need a b-&-w version of the drawing, you'll have it archived. Also if you sell your original artwork, your will always have the "scan" document archived for *The Huge Retrospective Coffee Table Book* that you'll publish when your 70. It's also a good idea to temporarily keep a copy of these, & all the other versions of your document on a zip disk in case of crashes. Then when all your zips are full, "Archive" everything onto CDs.)

setting up in layers

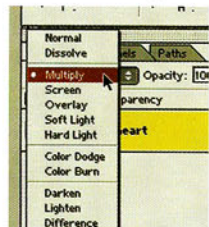
Convert your document to CMYK. Go into your layers palette & rename your Layer "lineart." Now put it on "multiply."

Next, *copy* your layer so you have a "lineart copy." Then make a new, blank layer (self-named "layer 1"). So now there



are three layers in all & they look like so.

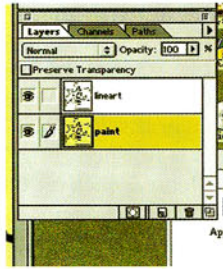
Now turn off the "lineart" eyeball so that that layer is not visible. Now you have to change the order in which the layers are being displayed in the layers palette. Bring "layer 1" to the bottom, "lineart" to the top & leave "lineart copy" in the middle. Now fill "layer 1" with a color of your choosing (I use a dull, light yellow, C:11, M:4, Y:40, K:1). (To "fill," just hit Option + Delete. Or make that an "Action"—that's what I



do.) Now merge the two visible layers & rename the resulting layer “paint.”

Now you can turn the “lineart” layer’s eyeball back on. At this point you should have two layers in total. Your layers palette should look like this.

You are now set up to color using my adjustment method of coloring...

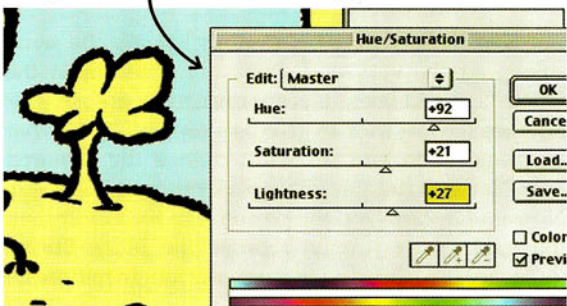


adjusting colors

All coloring will be done on the “paint” layer. From now on we’ll use the “lineart” layer for nearly *nothing*. It’s really only there as a master of the image that will act as an overlay once the paint layer is finished. & also for making selections occasionally.

Now at this point most people would start going back & forth to the **Colour Swatches** or the **Colour Picker** to sample colors with which to fill spaces. That’s a huge bore, & half the time you end up settling on an imperfect color because you’re trying to guess what color will look right in the *illustration* while looking at it in that *nasty little interface*.

Instead, try this: while on the “paint” layer, use the **Magic Wand*** tool (a tolerance of 60 is a good general setting) to select an area that you want to color. Now hit **Command U** (the shortcut to get to the **Hue/Saturation** adjustment interface). You’ll be using this command a lot, so get accustomed to it.



Now by adjusting the three variables (Hue, Saturation & Lightness) you can achieve any color you like. & it soon becomes very intuitive if you always use the same starting color. For instance, if

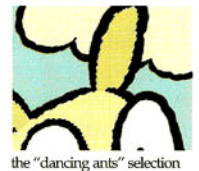
you want red, you know to slide your **Hue** knob to the left, if you want blue, slide it to the right. The **Lightness** knob makes the color lighter or darker & the **Saturation** makes the color either more saturated or more dull & grey. From there you can achieve any color you like.

So now you select every space, one at a time & adjust it to whatever color you choose. It’s a pretty long process, but it can be amazingly exhilarating. Don’t be afraid to re-think some early color choices as others are introduced. It should be an organic, relaxing process of give & take. & besides, the fact that colors are so easily changed when you’re working digitally is one of its greatest advantages over traditional methods, so you should *embrace* that.

*The Magic Wand tool is most useful if you use an inking style that closes in areas. An open line style will make digital coloring much more time-consuming. There are some good ways to make selections on open line drawings using the Quickmask tool, but that’s a whole other subject.

shading using quickmask & a tablet

If you want to do any modelling/shading, use the Quickmask tool. Select an area of color (or many areas at once, by holding down the Shift Key while using the Magic Wand), then hit the **letter Q** key (shortcut to Quickmask mode). Now your selection will be displayed as a *darkened area* rather than an area with the “dancing ants” circling it. If I remember correctly, Photoshop’s default color for Quickmask is red. This can be very confusing, so I suggest you change it to Black at 40% opacity. To do this, go to the little quickmask icon in your tools palette & double-click on it. From there you can change the color & opacity to anything you like. Oh, & put “color indicates:” to “Selected Areas.”



the “dancing ants” selection



the selected area as a quickmask



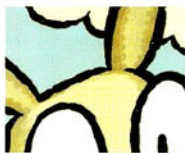
subtracting from the selection with the eraser.

(Now if you don’t have a Tablet, you can still use this method, but you’re severely handicapped in terms of expressiveness & subtlety. Did I already mention that Tablets are a Godsend?)

So what you want to do now is imagine the darkened area (the Quickmask) as the shaded area that you want to end up with. Get the Eraser tool (shortcut: **letter E**) & with the opacity and/or thickness **ON** in the Eraser Options box, subtract the parts of the Quickmask that you **DON'T** want to be shaded. I realize that sounds confusing, but if you give it a try, it should become clear.

Once you've got the darkened area the way you like it, hit letter Q again, changing your Quickmask back to the dancing ants again. Now you're going to adjust that area to a darker shade of the existing color. (But first, because those ants are so distracting, hit **Command H**—this makes the ants invisible, but the selection still exists).

Now hit Command U again & use the knobs again to adjust your selection.



adjusting the selection

Keep in mind that different colors need to be adjusted differently. For instance a red may need to be darkened not only with the Lightness knob, but also by using the Hue knob to add a bit of blue. & generally speaking, any time you darken a color it may be a good idea to add a bit of Saturation, as darkening will dull most colors.

Also, if you want to apply a selection in a more *illustrative* way with your Tablet (rather than using the Magic Wand) just hit the letter Q while you have **nothing** selected. Now you can use your Tablet to “draw” a selection, using the Paintbrush tool. Then when you hit Q again, whatever you've drawn *becomes* the selection. Use Command U again to adjust that selection.

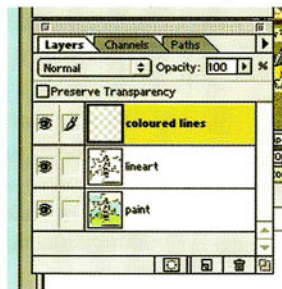
Now using that same method, you can also *lighten* areas. To make it more logical when doing so, double-click on the Quickmask tool again & change your Quickmask color to **White** instead of Black.

coloring lineart

Once you're done with the “paint” layer, you may want to color some of the black lineart. This is a great effect, but you've got to know when to use it.

First create a new layer. Place it above the other two

layers & rename it “colored lines.” Now turn off all the layer eyeballs *except* “lineart.” Highlight the “lineart” layer & select all (Command A). Now go up to the Select Menu & click on **Color Range**. Set “fuzziness” all the way over to 200. Now use the eyedropper to select the black lineart (you only need to touch one spot of black & instantly **ALL** the black on the layer is selected). Hit Okay. Once your poor computer is finished chugging away, go back up to the Select Menu & click on **Grow**. Now your lineart is selected. But don't apply any paint on the actual “lineart” layer. Instead, highlight the “colored lines” layer & hit Command H again. All your layer eyeballs should be turned on. Here's what your layers palette should look like now.



Now to apply the appropriate color to each line, simply get your Paintbrush tool (with the opacity & thickness boxes turned **off** this time). Begin with lines in the background. You always want to be coloring a line that is behind some *other* line, & then overlapping it with your next color.

Now, let's say you want to color the lineart that is outlining a green area... simply hold down the Option key while in the Paintbrush tool. That temporarily turns your cursor into an Eyedropper tool so you can quickly sample the green... now *that* green is the green that's in your Paintbrush palette when you release the Option key. Now you can paint that green into the selection that surrounds the green area.

But *that* looks wrong because it's *exactly* the same color... At the very end we're going to adjust the whole “colored lines” layer at once to fix that, but for now we'll use a trick to give us a rough idea of what we're going to end up with: change the “colored lines” layer to roughly 75% opacity during this stage. Now it will show you the green *line* a bit darker than the green *area* simply because the black lineart underneath is showing through the less than opaque “colored lines” layer.

So just keep coloring all the lines you want changed, always using the option key to sample area colors; sample red for red areas, grey for grey areas, & so on.

When you're done, put the layer's opacity back up to 100% & select the entire layer (Command A: select all). Command U, & adjust all the colored lines on the entire layer. A good rule of thumb is to darken a bit & add a bit of saturation. When you've got MOST of the layer looking right, deselect (Command D).

Now because you've used the same adjustment for the whole layer, some colors won't be perfect. You need to get the Magic Wand again & select the problem colored lines individually to tweak them. For this, I recommend a Magic Wand tolerance of around 5.

Now your piece is more or less finished, so remember to Save A Copy. Call it something like "done in layers." This is an important version to have because soon you'll Flatten the whole image, which makes the whole thing look more cohesive. But remember to always keep versions of the document at each stage so that you can go back & re-do things if you need to. Once your piece is flattened it's REALLY hard to get good selections.

filters

Sometimes that ultra-clean digital look is exactly what you're after. That's fine. But if you want to make your illustration look a little more organic, it's a good idea to try Filters. I'm not a fan of filters that change the illustration fundamentally, like making it look like a Van Gogh painting, or like it was built out of chrome. Best to use them subtly otherwise the viewer won't even think a human was involved.

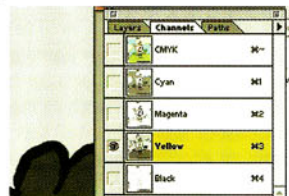
Two good, honest filters I like to use are the "Add Noise" filter (found under "noise") & then the "Gaussian Blur" filter (found under "blur"). Use both very sparingly. They don't try to hide the fact that it's a digitally colored illustration, they just give it a warmth, a bit of grain & character.

One thing to be aware of is that if you're going to Publish the illustration, the Add Noise filter can dirty up your K channel (the Black) even though it's not perceivable on your monitor*. So here's what I do to avoid that: first apply the filter at whatever

amount you like, then hit Okay. But then **immediately** hit Command Z (undo).

Now you'll be able to hit Command F (Last Filter used) & get that same filter at the same amount. But to avoid applying it to your K Channel, just go into Channels (it's in your Layers Palette)—

now one at a time, highlight each channel **except** K & hit Command F each time. That will apply the filter to each of those channels one at a time. (Before



you go back to the Layers Palette, highlight the CMYK so that no single channel is highlighted.)

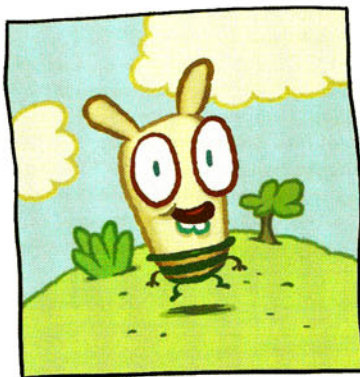
*I discovered this with my first use of Add Noise. When my illustration came back from the printer, it looked like it was lightly sprinkled with fine pepper. What Add Noise does is messes up the pixels of your illustration... makes it look a little grainy & filmic (you can see what it's doing by zooming in to 200 or 400% magnification while applying the filter). But while the K channel looks nice & soft & subtle on your monitor, it seems to confuse the Offset Printer somewhat.

flattening, getting ready for print

Now that your piece is done (and you have a version in layers saved!!) go ahead & Flatten the layers together into one layer. You'll notice that this gives your illustration a certain "complete" look that it's lacked during the whole process. A very satisfying moment! Keep in mind that if you're going to *Print* with this illustration, & particularly if you're putting it into a Quark document, you'll have to use a version that is an EPS. Otherwise, Quark won't even recognize it. When you convert it into an EPS, the MB size of the document will increase dramatically. That's unavoidable.

Hopefully this article will be useful to you, & it's been worth the pounding headache you no doubt are now enduring. Having to write it out makes it sound incredibly complicated, but if You & I were both sitting at a computer & I was just **SHOWING** you how to do it, it would seem quite easy.

Now go out there & make me **PROUD**, Fellow Artist!



see more of Dave Cooper's adorable PIP in Dark Horse's big fat "Completely PIP + norton" collection this summer!

THE DOCTOR IS IN

DRAW! EDITOR MIKE MANLEY GIVES A STEP-BY-STEP ON PRODUCING THE ADVENTURES OF DR. DIRECT WEB COMIC STRIP

On the face of it you wouldn't think precision mass flow or liquid processes sound like they would be very interesting subjects, unless you were an engineer or a scientist of some sort. Well this was the problem a local ad agency Praxis Communications wanted solved when they approached me early last year, and inquired about me producing an Internet comic strip for their client Brooks Instruments. Brooks makes a device called Quantum, which they wanted to try and push in a different and unique way. They felt that a comic strip would be the way to go. Maybe make it a bit more fun, and make their product stand out in the crowd. So after a bit of back and forth with the agency, they settled on the idea of doing a weekly web-based comic strip featuring Dr. Direct, a sort of goofy scientist type. Each week the Doctor, aided by his faithful dog Kepler and his bird Gaspard, would ride to the rescue of some scientist in distress on his motorcycle.

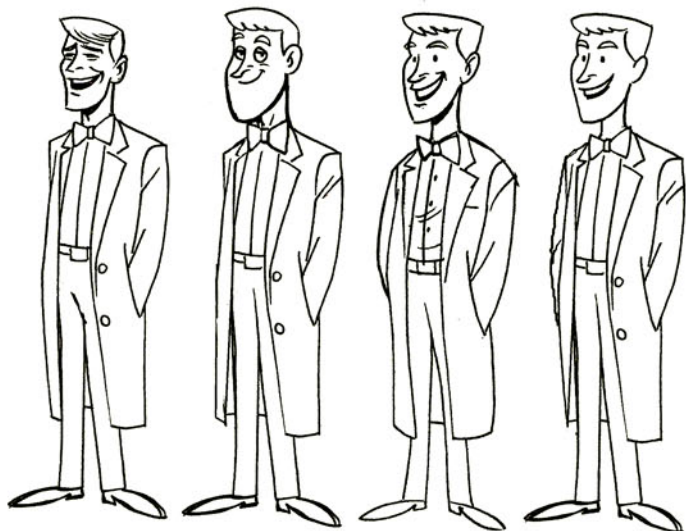
Praxis had been producing short promo films and video bits using a live action Dr. Direct (sans dog and bird) helping technicians and scientists in trouble by introducing them to Brooks' Quantum device.

Advertising agencies have been using comics and comic strips to sell products for decades. We all remember the Hostess Fruit Pie ads in Marvel and DC comics featuring our favorite heroes defeating the nefarious villains with the irresistible golden flaky crusts and delicious fruit fillings. The newspaper Sunday Funnies section had long been full of very similar ads hawking dish soap, tooth polish, candy and even cigarettes! Yes, while Jack and Jill read the Sunday comic section, they also got to read comic strips drawn by agency artists depicting the Smooth of Phillip Morris cigarettes.

Oh, how times have changed. Many famous cartoonists and comic strip characters also lent their four-color salesmanship to help Madison Avenue sell products to the millions of comic readers every week.

The first stage was to get the designs for the characters down and develop the

THE EVOLUTION OF A CHARACTER



© 2006 BROOKS INSTRUMENT

Working from the visual reference of the actor who portrayed Dr. Direct in the videos, I proceeded to do a series of rough designs of the characters. There were certain requests made by the client. They wanted the dog to be similar to the dog Grommet from the Nick Park, *Wallace and Grommet* films. They also wanted the Doc to have a sort of smart-aleck bird.

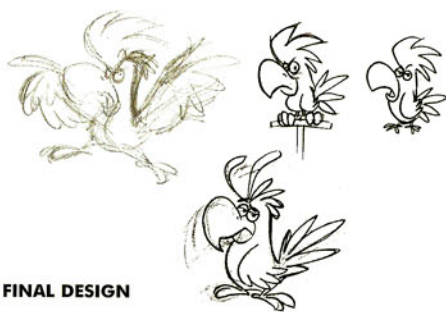
I started out just doodling rough and fast. The Doctor was easy since I already had a visual reference to work from. I referred the client to my website and they asked for a style similar to the more cartoonish or animated look of some of the work I had featured there. One of the technical concerns I wanted to lick right away was the web-based format.

I did a series of designs of the Doctor, and really pushed for the version with the "dot" eyes which luckily the agency and client both liked. I wanted the Doctor to have a slightly childlike appearance and I feel that doing things like "dot" eyes is a lot of fun. I was also drawing inspiration from cartoons like the Jay Ward style (*Rocky and Bullwinkle* as well as the old Captain Crunch ads) and cartoonists like Hank Ketcham (*Dennis the Menace*) and his clear and elegant line style. I felt that type of approach would work well and be fun to do.



THE FINAL DESIGN

ABOVE: After the Doctor was done I worked next on his canine cohort, who is actually the brains of the outfit, Kepler. I started sketching, doodling. I initially wanted to keep him looking like anything but Grommet and went for a sheepdog type look. But I ended up coming around to a smother look.



THE FINAL DESIGN

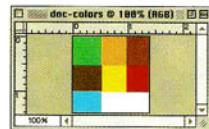


format. The agency had a writer already lined up that they had worked with before. The writer was an old Marvel Comics fan and looked forward to working on something probably a little more outside of his usual milieu. His writing was pretty sharp, witty and more to the point he did a very good job of conveying the technical aspects and "the pitch" of the Quantum device, something that is frankly pretty hard to do and make funny.

One of the first things I had to do was get everyone on the same page as to style and format. What worked best for the clients needs vs. artistic considerations and format. I gave the agency a little crash-course in comics and web comics. Though most people have read the comics and funnies, even very talented people often don't have any clue how comics are made. So once we were all on the same page we came up with a format that would solve a few big criteria, readability, and easy download/file size. At 72 dpi and with the amount of copy that would be required I realized that at times the visuals were certainly going to be taking second place to the copy. Thus a simple clear easy to read style was a must. Also the simpler the style, the easier (in theory) the strip would be able to produce every week. I already had experience in doing web comics from my own web strip *G.I.R.L. Patrol* (www.actionplanet.com). I had learned through trial and error the differences between regular print comics and the web. You just don't have the resolution to do detail at the small file size that the strip would need to be to load into the viewers web browser without a long download time. One of the things I enjoy the most about working on web comics is the color and color combinations you can get in RGB as opposed to print CMYK. You can get really intense colors; color combinations right next to each other that would be impossible in print.

The client also wanted the strip available to print out so a version of the strip was converted and prepared by the agency to be downloaded via PDF in Adobe Acrobat. This way fans who like the strip could print it out and pin it up at work. You could have your cake and eat it too.

After settling on a color scheme for each character, I made a small color palette for each character in Photoshop, which sped up the coloring process. I kept the palettes open when coloring the characters, holding down the option key to quickly sample the desired color and using the paint bucket to fill in selected areas.



ABOVE MIDDLE: The bird Gaspard was the easiest, since He was a parrot. I can't help but hear comedian Gilbert Godfried's voice in my head when reading his dialogue. I wonder why? The goal was always to make the silhouettes of the characters read very cleanly since they would at times have to be quite small in the panels to accommodate the copy.

RIGHT: This is the final design of the Doc and gang that was approved by the client.

ABOVE: The palette I made for each character to speed up the coloring process.

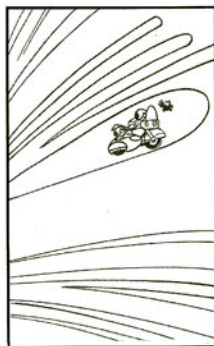
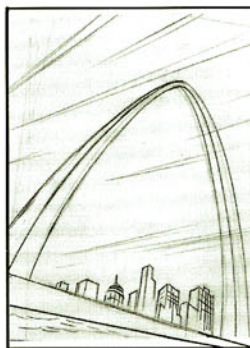
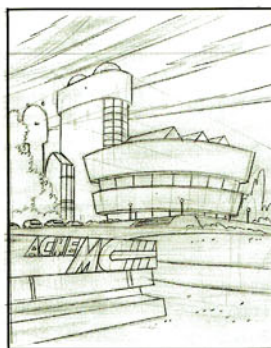
THE PROCESS

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. DIRECT - Episode 1

<p>You sleep in the laboratory of Acme MegaChew, a very big head.</p> <p>Client: If I said it once, I'll say it again - I can't get my process to repeat itself!</p> <p>Three nanoseconds later, our names appear in the MegaChew ad.</p> <p>Client: Dr. Direct! How'd you get here so fast?</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Oh, we always take the direct route. Near what seems to be the problem?</p>	<p>Meanwhile, high in the giant sensor tube that is the St. Louis Archway, our hero vibrona with his clients.</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Hey Kaptain, be a good dog and take another reading of the Mississippi's flow rate from our mega-Corvida meter, will you?</p> <p>Client: I've worked for months trying to accurately reproduce my process for scale-up, but my mass flow measurement just won't repeat itself!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Repeat itself? Repeat itself? Repeat!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Relax, my friend. You just need a way to predictably measure your mass flow, over and over again.</p>	<p>Suddenly, the phone rings.</p> <p>Dr. Direct: That's... the Direct Line.</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Process problem? Process problem? Repeat!</p> <p>Client: Whatdaya gaff? Is that repeat?</p> <p>Dr. Direct: No, it's better than that. It's QUANTUM™ - the first and only Corvida measurement and control device for pilot plant processes. Quantum™ provides a repeatability of better than 0.05% of rate, and because it measures mass flow through the Corvida effect - it uses the same technology you'll have in your full-scale plant!</p>	<p>In a flashpoint, Dr. Direct and his clients jump into their transportation transporter.</p> <p>(Visual note: It's a motorcycle with wheels)</p> <p>Dr. Direct: You're right, Gaspard. Someone needs us, it's time for... the Quantum™ Leap!</p> <p>Client: Where, with Quantum, things will never be the same!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Actually, for the first time, things will be the same. Because Quantum™ lets you take accurate, repeatable readings, over and over again!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Over and over! Over and over! Repeat!</p> <p>LOO IN NEXT WEEK, FOR EPISODE TWO!</p>
---	---	--	---

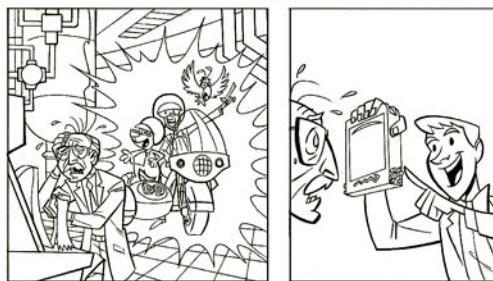
ABOVE: The script written and formatted by the writer, Art Levy. Once approved by the client and agency it is sent via e-mail to me.

RIGHT: The first step for me is to do a rough breakdown of the script to get a feel for the layout and flow. The format is pretty tight here since there is a lot of copy.



ABOVE: This is the final penciled strip, done just tight enough so I won't have to worry when I go to inks, but clear enough for the client to see all the important details. Each panel is drawn on 8 1/2" x 11" laser printer paper in 2B pencil. Since everything is being done digital the original can be done on copy paper, and scanned.

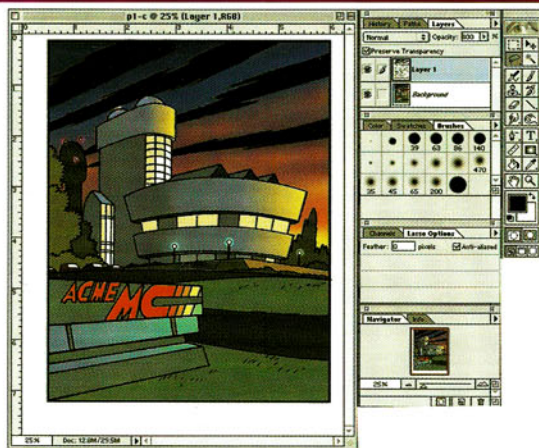
INKING



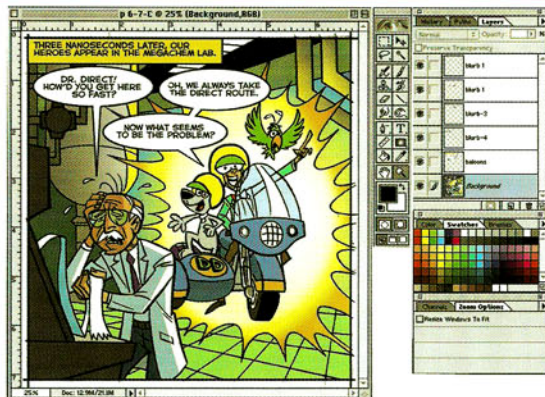
LETTERING



COLORING



FINAL ART



INKING: I inked 99% of the strips with a combination of Micron Pigma markers No.1 and 003. They work well, have a nice line and are permanent, though you do have to really allow the inking to dry a good 10 minutes or better depending on heat and humidity before erasing. I was able to ink the strips really fast with these markers and again, the speed was an issue here. Since the original never left my studio, I felt that working with markers was fine and safe.

LETTERING: Originally I started doing all the lettering in Photoshop, but with the last few strips I changed over to using Adobe Illustrator. Opening the script in Microsoft Word, I'd cut and paste the copy into the Photoshop document in layers. I'd draw the balloons on a separate layer with the Elliptical Marquee tool and set the stroke width at 6 pixels. I'd draw the balloon tails with either the line tool set to the same width or freehand with the paintbrush. The balloons are filled white with the paint bucket and the image is saved as a jpeg and sent off to the client for approval.

COLORING: The coloring is always the most fun part of the job for me, and it's something that most people comment on right away when they see the strip. I start by opening the art in Photoshop as a bitmap and then do any touch-ups and clean-ups. Then I covert the image to **RGB**. Next I select the image and cut and paste it into a new layer. I take the lasso and select a small area of the white, and then from the menu I select **Similar** and then **Delete**. This deletes everything but the black line art and creates essentially a clear cell, like in animation. I check the **Preserve Transparency** box.

I now have two layers, a **Background Layer** and a black line layer, **Layer 1**. This allows me to color on the background and leave the black line art on **Layer 1** alone, or I can use the paintbrush set to **Normal** to paint over the black lines on **Layer 1** and create a **color line**. Using a combination of the **Bucket**, **Paintbrush** and **Gradient** tools I color each individual panel. I like simple gradients and not an excessive amount of modeling since the style of the strip is very graphic. The main goal is to make the elements read, separate figures from foreground and background.

FINAL ART: The final art is assembled by flattening the layers of the color art and pasting that image into the document containing the pencil drawing and the lettering. I delete the pencil layer and then flatten the image. I save the final panels each at 343 pixels high (the format dimensions required by the agency) at 72 dpi, then save them as jpegs with an **Image Quality** compression of 8 and check the **Baseline Standard** format button. Then each panel is sent separately via FTP to the agency's server using **FETCH**.

SYSTEM AND SOFTWARE: I am using a G4 Power Mac running OS 9.1 with a 100 gig hard drive and 400 megs of RAM. I use Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator and an Intuos 9" x 12" digital tablet.



58 THE BEST OF DRAW!

Comic strips have long been used to sell products of all types in the Sunday Funnies sections read by millions before the days of TV. Here is a selection of a few of them I have collected over the years clipped from the pages of the comic sections of several newspapers. Action, humor and drama were all employed to enhance the story and "sell" the virtues of the product. Dull hair, bad breath? Don't worry, we've got just the product for you! I drew on these as inspiration for Dr. Direct.

© 2006 THOS. LEEMING & CO., INC.

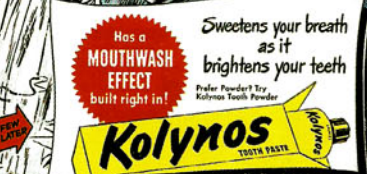


ABOVE: An ad from 1951 showing the amazing benefits of fast acting Ben-Gay. BELOW: Two strips, one humorous and one dramatic, for the Wildroot line of products (year unknown). The client obviously wanted to appeal to both sexes. These types of ads were mixed right in along side the regular comic strips like Popeye and Prince Valiant.

© 2006 WILDROOT CO., INC.

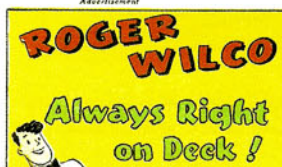


HIS ONLY CHANCE TO KISS A BRIDE...is at someone else's wedding!



© 2006 WHITEHALL PHARMACEUTICAL CO.

Advertisement:



© 2006 WALTER H. JOHNSON CANDY CO., INC.

ABOVE: Frank Robbins, who started out on the *Scorchy Smith* newspaper strip and later went on to fame with his own *Johnny Hazard* adventure strip, supplied the art for this Kolynos toothpaste ad.

LEFT: Puns away! Roger Wilco to the rescue. A play on the "end of message or transmission" slang used during communications popularized in WW II.

BOTTOM: Cranky? Hangover? Maybe it's that cigarette you're smokin', Mac! It's hard to believe that these ads for cigarettes ran right along with *Little Orphan Annie* and *Flash Gordon*. Every week kids all over the nation as well as parents saw ads for cigarettes along with their comic entertainment. Parent groups as well as the Surgeon General would never stand for this now. But this also speaks of the fact that millions of adults also read the weekly Sunday comic section, and advertisers knew this type of strip, well drawn, would be read by a huge percentage of their target market. It's hard to imagine how popular comic strips were before a TV in every house became a common thing.



© 2006 PHILIP MORRIS INC.

Advertisement

Advertisement

A BREAKFAST STAR IS BORN

Introducing
"Cheeri O'Leary"
The Cheerioats Girl

Let's give this little girl a big hand! She's
CHEERI O'LEARY...official representative for CHEERIOATS



DON'T SAY
"GOOD MORNING!"
...SAY
"CHEERIOATS!"



Sketch of CHEERI's right hand; this is the new she dips into the package of CHEERIOATS. This new kind of breakfast cereal makes good "morning."

Close-ups showing how expression is achieved with very simple lines. These expressions fitted across CHEERI's face as she tasted CHEERIOATS for the first time.



BEFORE tasting, CHEERI's face showed surprise, anticipation. The word "doughnut" alone of CHEERIOATS is sure to make a bit of a start with young and old alike!



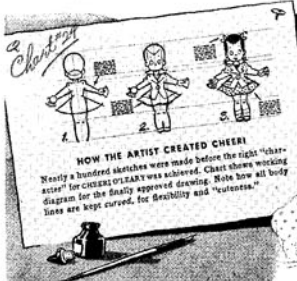
DURING taste test, CHEERI's face clearly expressed enthusiastic approval... some amazing! CHEERIOATS has one and eye added for a delicious "Triple-Grain" flavor that's really new!



AFTER trying, she threw back her head for a laugh of pure delight. CHEERI simply loved CHEERIOATS! Very happy to have a wonderful oatmeal cereal in this class, ready-to-eat form.

GO WEST, YOUNG WOMAN
...AND MEET THE STARS!

She's headed for Hollywood... to spread the good news about CHEERIOATS to many famous movie folks. (Don't worry... we won't really let her hitchhike to the coast.) You will probably see her on her way, by plane or train, in the July 10th issue of this newspaper.



...the new, nourishing oatmeal cereal that comes all ready-to-eat. This part was created to symbolize the cheerful-ness... the lift that this brand-new kind of cereal will give to your breakfast. You'll be seeing a good deal of CHEERI from now on. We hope she walks right into your heart and stays.



Artist's sketch shows how CHEERI would look with "doughnut" ears and shoes. However, she never has to do this... since CHEERIOATS comes all ready-to-eat. There's no cooking to do.



SEE? IT LOOKS LIKE LITTLE DOUGHNUTS!



NEW OATMEAL CEREAL
...COMES READY-TO-EAT!
CORN AND RYE ADDED
for Unique "Triple-Grain" Flavor

Here's America's "old reliable" for breakfast nourishment, in handy ready-to-eat form! No cooking to do! And what a delicious flavor! CHEERIOATS is 75% ground oatmeal, with corn and rye added... and perishes full of natural goodness of Vitamin B₁, Vitamin G, Calcium, Phosphorus and Iron. CHEERIOATS is a product of General Mills, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

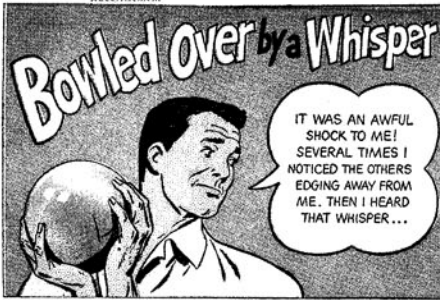
Cheerioats



© 2006 GENERAL MILLS INC.

Advertisement

Advertisement

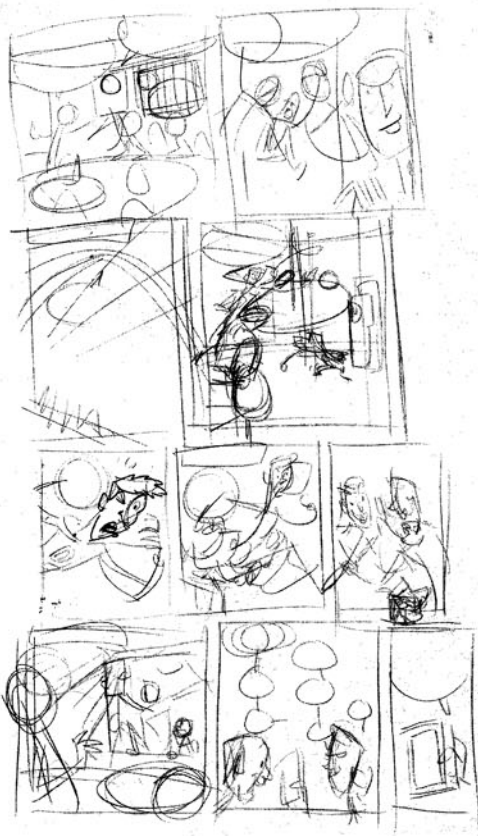


ABOVE: Cheeri O'Leary was the original mascot for Cheerioats which later became Cheerios. This is her introduction to the world from the Sunday July 12th Philadelphia Inquirer. This is a great ad complete with a "how-to-draw" section.

LEFT: Hey don't be a dope, buy our soap! Want to get a strike every time? Well, solid all-over protection is what you need, Jim. A really funny Lifebuoy Soap ad (year unknown). It almost seems like a parody ad, but nope, they were serious about your B.O.



© 2006 LEVER BROTHERS CO.



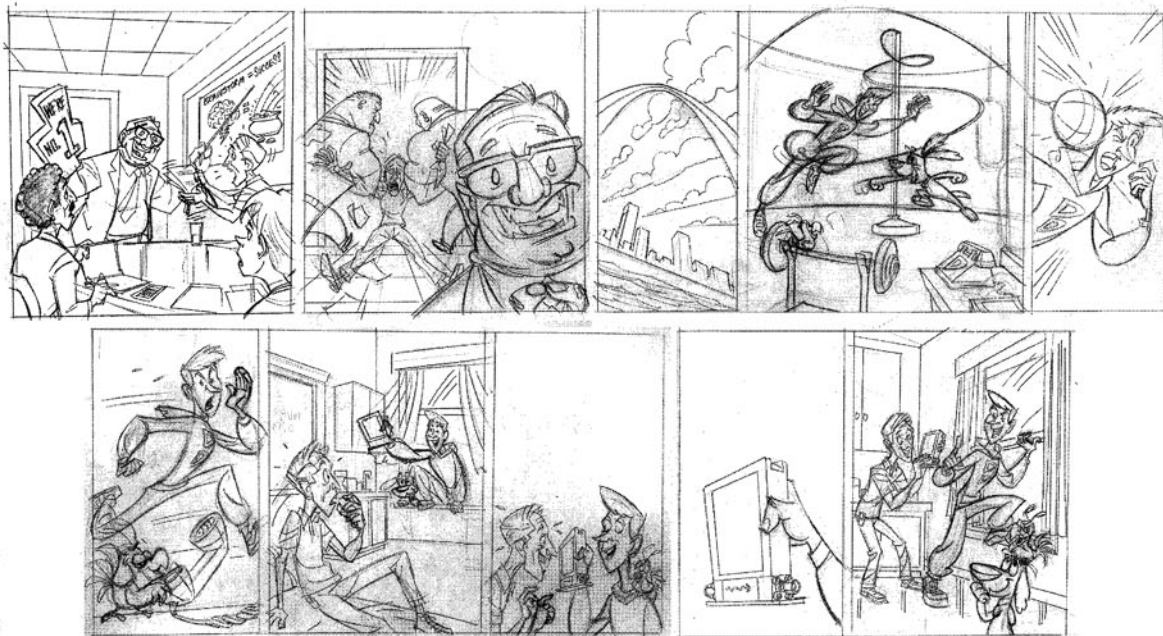
LEFT: The very rough layout of episode 11. Often I will have to add an extra panel to separate actions and allow for better staging and more room for the art and copy. The goal was to always have clear, simple staging; strong gesture; and silhouette.

BELOW: The script for episode 11 by the writer, Art Levy.

BOTTOM: The final pencils for the strip ready to import into Illustrator and add the lettering.

THE ADVENTURES OF DR. DIRECT - Episode 11

<p>Protagonist weighs in heavily at an Acme Magazine brainstorming session.</p> <p>(Visual: chemists and "buds" gathered around a table.)</p> <p>Facilitator: And remember, brainstorming sessions are designed to solve problems.</p> <p>Chemist #1: Excuse me, our weigh scales are designed for batch processes—how can we use them to measure continuous liquid mass flow?</p> <p>Facilitator: What are you trying to do? Cause problems?</p> <p>Then, in less time than it takes to read a comic strip panel...</p> <p>Chemist: Dr. Direct! How'd you get here so fast?</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Direct connection. But that's not important. What's the important is that I brought you Quantin™ — the Coriolis-based low-flow mass controller that provides accurate measurement and control, no matter your fluid characteristics.</p>	<p>(Visual: the chemist is being carried out of the room)</p> <p>Chemist (distracted, as he's being carried out): ...but fluids don't always have a constant composition! We need something more accurate than weight scales! AIEEE!</p> <p>Facilitator: Okay, next topic...</p> <p>Chemist: So then, I don't even need weigh scales???</p> <p>Dr. Direct: That's right. No need to weigh.</p> <p>Chemist: No way!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: No weigh.</p> <p>Bird: O yeah.</p>	<p>Meanwhile, high atop the St. Louis Arch, Dr. Direct and his friends are enjoying a relaxing game of indoor tether-ball.</p> <p>Dr. Direct: Good boy, Kepler. Your knowledge of the Coriolis effect helped you correctly calculate that object's rotation. Let's play against Broussé!</p> <p>Phone: Ring! Ring!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: It's...the Direct Line!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: You see, Quantin™ provides for instantaneous dynamic mass flow measurement. Plus, you can also use it to gather accurate online density and temperature data — and thereby improve your overall process performance!</p>	<p>Dr. Direct's faithful companion Gaspar answers the line.</p> <p>(Visual: Gaspar — the bird — talking into phone.)</p> <p>Bird: Hello! Hello! Who's a pretty boy? Broussé!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: No time for that now, Gaspar. We've got to get to Acme MegaChem!</p> <p>Chemist: No way!</p> <p>Dr. Direct: No weigh.</p> <p>Bird: I'm not going through that again.</p> <p>LOG IN NEXT WEEK, FOR EPISODE TWELVE.</p>
--	--	---	---



THE ADVENTURES OF DR. DIRECT NO 11

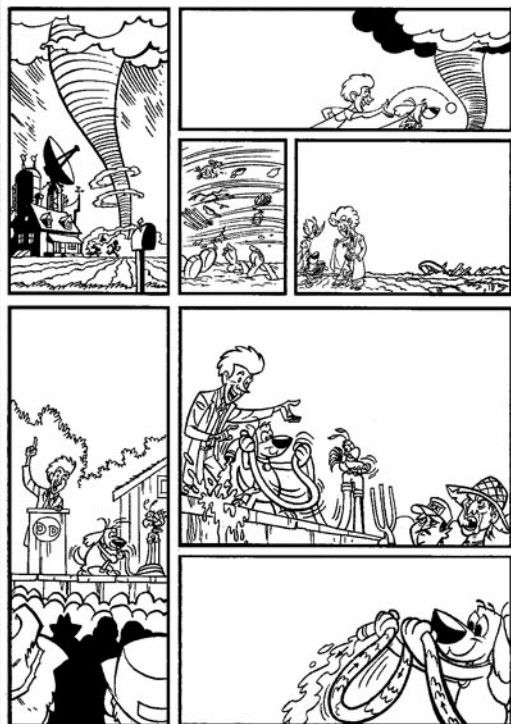


LEFT: The final strip for episode 11 saved at 72 dpi in jpeg format. Sometimes I will use Photoshop's Hue & Saturation filters to play around with the colors a bit.

RIGHT: This is the pencils of the first page of the trade show comic *The Adventures of Dr. Direct* that my studio produced for Brooks Instruments through the agency Praxisis. It was a rush job, a complete full-color comic from start to finish in only a few weeks. The deadline was a killer but the trade show date was firm; miss the printer's window and it does no good to ship a product even one day late.

After the page was drawn in pencil I scanned it in at 300 dpi in grayscale using my Microtek ScanMaker 9600, which allowed me to scan in the pages full-size, 10" x 15". the pencils were drawn on Strathmore 3-ply hot press in 2B pencil. The lettering was added in Adobe Illustrator. The next step was to open the file as an EPS file at 72 dpi in RGB and sent the final penciled pages over to Praxisis via FTP using Fetch.

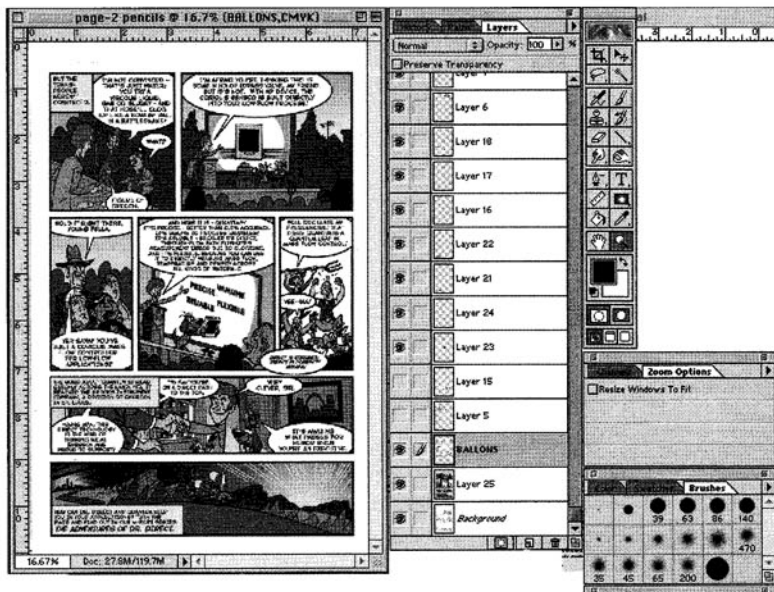
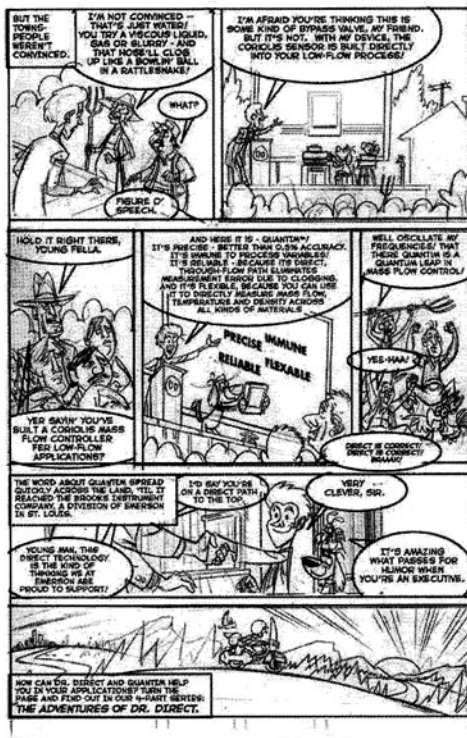
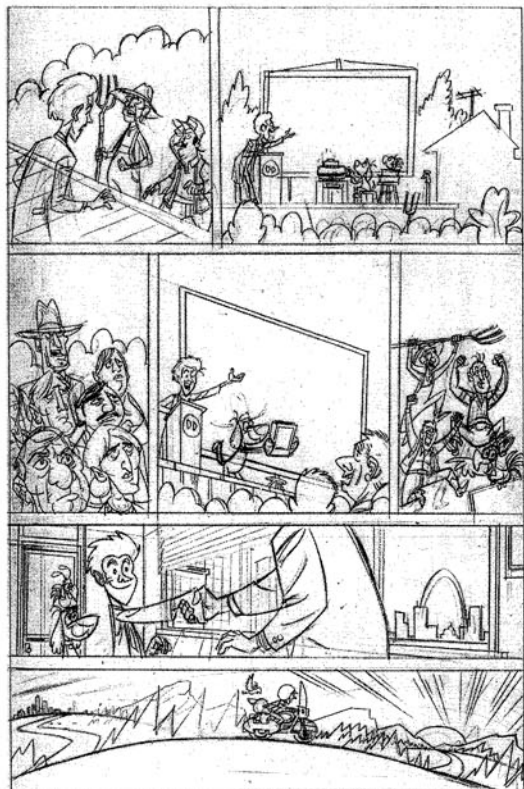
BELOW: Once the pencils were approved I went straight to inks. The pages were inked with a combination of Micron Pigma markers No. 1 and 003, and pen and ink (Pelikan Type A ink and a Hunt No. 1 First National round point nib). Blacks were filled in on the computer in Photoshop.



THE ORIGINS OF DR. DIRECT



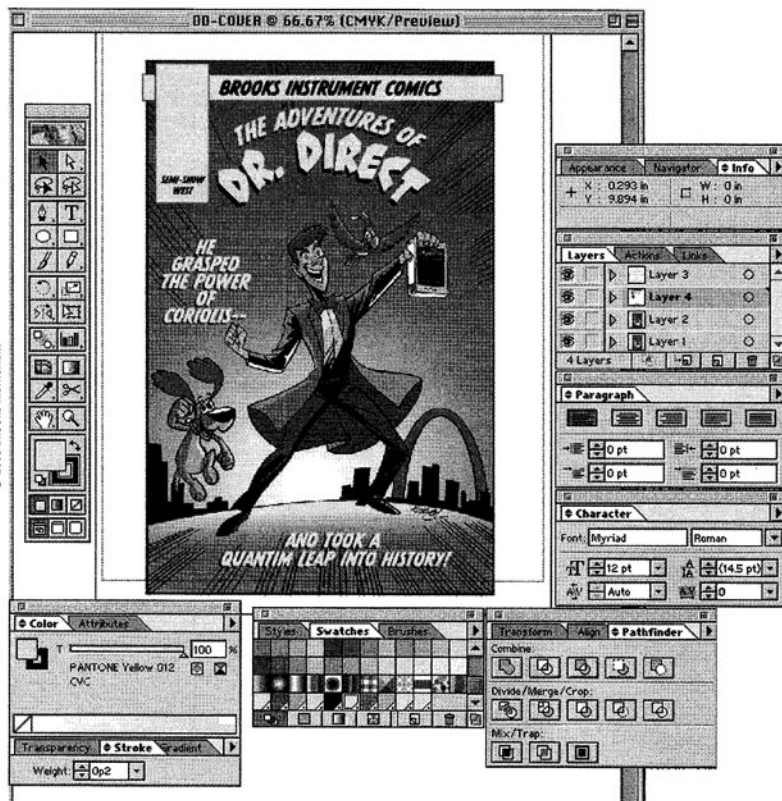
LEFT: The second page inked. I had to reverse the 6th panel in the end to accommodate the copy. Photoshop is a blessing when it comes to this type of thing.



TOP LEFT: The pencils for the second page.

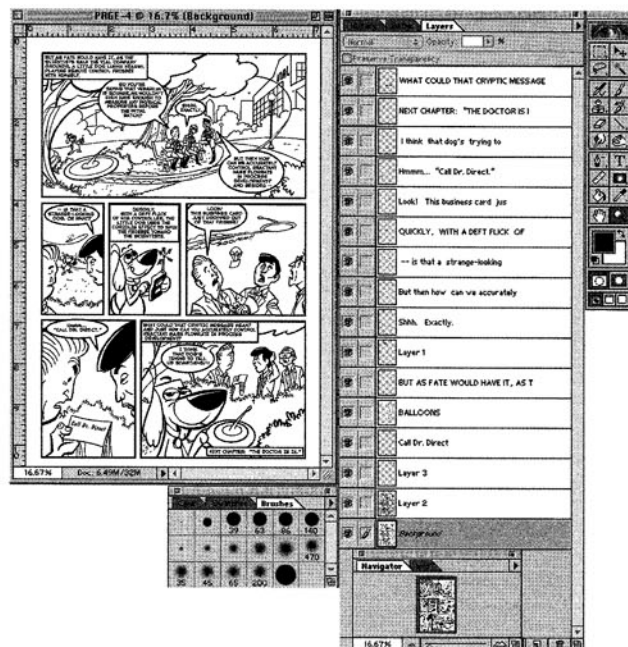
ABOVE: The next step was to add the lettering in Photoshop.

LEFT: The final page colored in Photoshop 5. Scott Cohn (www.scottcohn.com) colored most of the book with me going back over the pages tweaking the colors here and there.

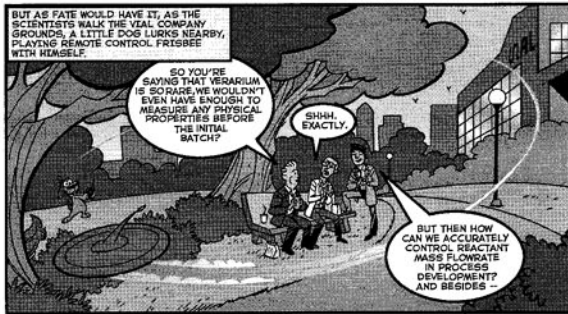


LEFT: The cover for the trade show comic. Once the art had been scanned in at 600 dpi and colored in Photoshop, it was saved as a 300 dpi EPS file and imported into Illustrator where the cover copy and title were added.

The art then was saved as an EPS file. Later the comic book was assembled using Quark Xpress.



LEFT: This illustration shows the art with the type for each balloon on a layer. Later all I would have to do is replace the black and white art with the color version and flatten the image.



RIGHT: Another page from the comic. The online version of this story is available for viewing on the Quantim website at: <http://www.emersonprocess.com/brooks/quantim/archives.htm>

Praxis Communications, the agency I worked with on Dr. Direct, can be contacted via their website at: www.praxcom.com

LEFT: The final page colored and ready to go. Later the same pages would be re-used and posted on the Quantim website. So the pages were designed for this dual purpose. Some color adjustments were done when going from CMYK, which is used for printing, to RGB, which is used for the Web.

BELOW: The reformatted comic pages as they appear on the website.



MAJOR DAMAGE



MAJOR DAMAGE TM & © 2006 CHRIS BAILEY

FROM 2-D to 3-D

An interview with Director and animator **Chris Bailey**

ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATED DIRECTOR (RUNAWAY BRAIN) AND ANIMATOR, CHRIS BAILEY HAS FINALLY FOUND A PROJECT TO WEB HIS TWO LOVES, **COMIC** AND **ANIMATION** TOGETHER—**MAJOR DAMAGE**. BAILEY'S COMPUTER ANIMATED SHORT ABOUT A YOUNG BOY WHO BECOMES HIS FAVORITE COMIC BOOK SUPER HERO.

DRAW! EDITOR MIKE MANLEY INTERVIEWED BAILEY FROM HIS CALIFORNIA HOME, IN-BETWEEN MIXING EPISODES OF BAILEY'S CURRENT PROJECT, DIRECTING AND CO-PRODUCING THE NEW ANIMATED SERIES **KIM POSSIBLE**, FOR THE DISNEY CHANNEL.

DRAW!: Chris, tell us a bit about your childhood and what hooked you into comics and animation? I understand you grew up in Portland, Oregon. Was there any one comic or artist that inspired you?

CB: I grew up in northeast Portland and went to Reynold's High School. I had a pretty average suburban life; played some sports in school and drew for the school paper. For as long as I can remember, I liked comics, cartoons and action adventure. I devoured shows like *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Sea Hunt*, *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Star Trek*, *Lost in Space*, etc... and watched all kinds of cartoons, from *Bugs Bunny* to *Space Ghost*. I enjoyed the few Disney films I saw growing up, but I didn't become a fan. I would just check out during the musical numbers. And no matter how dire the situation in a Disney film, I never believed a character was actually in danger. Just when the situation would get really grim and I was into it, they'd throw in some dopey gag to reassure the kids that everything would be okay. I hated that! I was much more interested stories where the characters could die.

My older brother read comics and I started picking them up from him before I could read. I would follow the stories just by looking at the pictures. Later, I recall staying with some friends out of town who were really into Marvel comics. They had stacks and stacks and they introduced me to those animated shows in the '60s. I thought they were great! They even had the bubble gum cards that when put together, formed a picture of a Marvel Comics cover. I couldn't have been any older than 6 or 7 at the time. When I first started to put artist names to the

comics, it was Gil Kane, John Buscema, John Romita, and Herb Trimpe that I responded to the most. In retrospect, it was because of their clear, simple staging and broad posing of the characters. If there were too many crowded panels on a page or not enough pages with the main hero on them, I'd pass. I would copy panels from all their books as I was teaching myself how to draw. I loved Gil's work because it was like looking at a cadaver. He knew where all the muscles were and how they connected to the bones. His poses were strong and graceful, too. John Buscema's *Thor* and *FF* sucked me in with the broad acting of the characters and clear staging, John Romita practically defines appeal and Herb Trimpe because he drew the Hulk smashing the hell out of jets and everything! The raw aggression in his work and the Hulk's problem with authority were irresistible to me. By the time I was 12 or so, I was convinced that I'd be a comics artist.

Tuesday and Thursday were comics days at the local 7-11. I would take a different bus home from school on those days that let out closer to the store. I was such a regular customer that the clerk would keep the bundle of comics unbroken behind the counter until I showed up so that nothing would sell out before I got there. I could cherry pick the comics in the best condition. Comics and large cola Slurpees were a staple in my life for years. In Jr. High School, a friend told me about a comic book store called Old Weird Harold's that sold back issues. Life was good.

DRAW!: You attended the California Institute of the Arts right out of high school. Was it an intimidating place to go? Was it hard to get into?

CB: I decided to apply to Cal Arts' character animation program during my junior year in high school. None of my teachers had even heard of it. I had just rediscovered cartoons after watching a Chuck Jones "Pepé Le Pew" cartoon on TV. Literally that same day, I read in *The Comics Journal* about an animation school sponsored by Disney that gave college credit. The key was the college credit as I felt my parents expected me to go to regular college, not a cartoon school. If Joe Kubert's school gave college credit at the time, I probably would have moved back east and gone there.

Becoming an animator had never occurred to me before that day. While I liked cartoons, I knew that Warner's didn't make those great *Bugs Bunnys* anymore and Disney was just chugging out one clunker after another every four years. But I figured that if the animation biz didn't work out then whatever I learned there could be applied to comics. I spent the next six months working on a portfolio which included a 30-second animation test and I was accepted in the Spring of my senior year. It's funny, it never occurred to me that I wouldn't get in, so I never bothered to apply to other schools. That was pretty stupid in retrospect. Many of my classmates at Cal Arts had been rejected once or twice before finally getting accepted.

My animation test was of a super-hero sitting in a Captain Kirk-like chair on the bridge of a spaceship. Another spaceship appeared on the view screen and he jumped up to a console, pushed a button and destroyed the ship. Then raised his fist in triumph. It was terrible. I painted the cels with Testers model paint. I knew nothing about timing so I would clock myself with a stop watch running down my hallway over and over. My brother Jeff built an animation stand and we shot it on 8mm film.

I didn't have an animation desk or a light table to animate or in-between with, so I used my portable TV as a substitute. I turned it on its back and flipped the channel to static and used tape to register the drawings. The curved surface was a pain to draw on. Later, I decided to "borrow" the light table from the school newspaper room overnight and on weekends. After a while, it was spending more time at my house than at the school and they reminded me whose it was. My art teacher and journalism advisor were very supportive. All my teachers were, as a matter of fact. For short reports, I would occasionally ask if I could do them as three-page comics stories and I don't recall anyone ever saying no.

The thing about the other students at Cal Arts was that most of them were Disney geeks to the same degree that I was a comics geek. It had never dawned on me that Disney geeks existed. They knew all the animators names and what they had drawn in which movies and I had only seen a few of the films while growing up. I didn't know who or what they were talking about half of the time. There were some former animators and directors from Disney on the faculty who would tell Walt stories and people would hang on their every word. It wasn't intimidating, it was new and cool.

DRAW!: Were you following comics all along the way, or did you stop buying them as you got more into animation?

CB: I've always bought comics. The more money I had, the more comics I bought. Sometimes I would follow artists and sometimes writers. Rarely would I buy a book based solely on character unless something new visually was being done with it. The more I was drawn into animation, the more it shaped my tastes in comics art. I became less a fan of the illustrators like Neal Adams and more a fan of people like Will Eisner; those artists who brought an exaggerated sense of acting and drama to their work as opposed to straight realism.

DRAW!: Who were your favorite artists, who inspired you along the way? I see you are a big John Buscema and Jack Kirby fan.



MAJOR DAMAGE TM & © 2006 CHRIS BAILEY



MAJOR DAMAGE TM & © 2006 CHRIS BAILEY

TOP: Melvin story sketch. The expression was inspired by the dialogue track which was voiced by Chris's son, Kevin Bailey.

BOTTOM: Finished render of animation. Fielding was adjusted to accommodate the Major Damage poster in the background.

CB: I love the broader, simpler Marvel artists from the '60s and '70s. Marie Severin is a favorite of mine as well as the other artists I mentioned. I liked her silly super-heroes from *Not Brand Echh!* and own a Subby page of hers. I didn't get Kirby as a kid and thought all of his characters looked like they were made of metal. I actually liked Colletta's inks on *Thor* because it softened him up. Talk about being young and dumb! Now I love Kirby's comics except for the ones with Colletta's inks. I have a page from the *Silver Surfer* graphic novel that he and Stan did that I never get tired of looking at. Joe Sinnott's inking is gorgeous.

John Buscema is amazing. The man can't make a bad drawing. He brought a level of illustration and acting to the Kirby dynamics that defined Marvel for me. I was regularly reading the *FF* during his first run on the book and loved it. I think it's funny that he now talks about how silly those characters are and how he doesn't get super-heroes. To me, he was co-creating some of the best fiction of my life.

One thing that both John Buscema and Gene Colan have in common that I like was the sense of weight their characters had. Buscema's characters were always so well-planted on the ground and Gene's Iron Man felt like he weighed 1000 pounds! That was always something that I've tried to get into my animation. For *Major Damage*, we experimented with several different types of walks on the Tiki Terrors to communicate their weight. If you look closely, you can see the difference from shot to shot.

One trick that always caught my eye was when comics artists would "animate" a character moving through a panel. I think John Byrne did it a lot. I liked it when I could "feel" the forces at work. Usually there was a drawing that didn't work in the sequence and it would stick out like a sore thumb to me. I tried the effect myself once in high school on a personal comic page and in-betweened the hell out of it. I think it was Shang Chi leaping into the air and kicking some guy in the face. I drew about a dozen poses between the extremes. Total overkill! Even though I wasn't consciously thinking about becoming an animator, animation was clearly an influence in my life.

DRAW!: Did your influences change as you developed as an artist?

CB: Sure. When I was young, complicated detail in drawing impressed me and I thought simple cartooning was for people who couldn't do illustration. Eventually, I realized that the people who drew the Disney films and the great Warner cartoons could draw circles around most comics artists. I started to appreciate the Hirschfield, Chuck Jones, Vip Parch, Kley, Harvey Kurtzman and others. Caricature overtook my interest in realism. Not the big head kind of caricature you find at the local carnival, but genuine caricature. I saw that believability is not the same as realism. To me, the "real" characters in a Disney film were never as real as the cartoon characters, even though I could tell the realistic characters were traced over actors.

One of the best things about being an animator at Disney was to draw in different styles. Working on *Hercules*, I animated Nessus, the River god, who was designed by Gerald Scarfe. He would do this thing where one side of the character would be smooth and elegant, but the other would be contrasted with lots

of detail. An elegant arm would be punctuated with a violent, gnarled hand with arthritic joints. His drawings were like Hirschfield characters on crack.

DRAW!: Were you into any video games or computer animation at all at that time? Things like *Tron*, etc.?

CB: Sure, but no more than the average kid. There wasn't a whole lot of computer animation or animation period to be inspired by in the late '70s/early '80s. I wanted to do comics. Films like *Star Wars* were inspiring for all its monsters and comic book trappings, but getting into the movies didn't seem as accessible as a career in comics and I never gave it much thought. Pretty ironic considering where I wound up.

DRAW!: Did you ever try and get into comics during this time? You know, do samples, make the convention rounds?

CB: I never did the convention rounds, but while working at Don Bluth Animation in the mid-'80s, Bruce Timm and I collab-



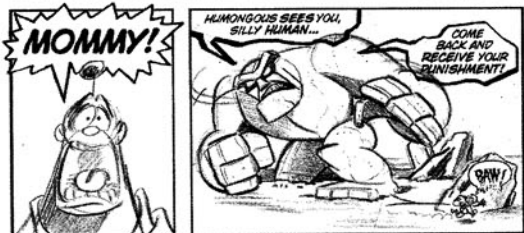
ABOVE: The cover for the upcoming *Major Damage* comic was inspired by Marie Severin and John Buscema's cover for *Fantastic Four* #107, one of Chris' favorite comics as a kid.

orated on a Dirk the Daring comics page. I penciled and he inked. We heard there was some interest on the part of a comics publisher for a *Dragon's Lair* comic and we wanted to throw our hats into the ring as the creative team. Nothing ever came from it. Later, after the studio closed down, I submitted some Daredevil pages to Marvel. Tom DeFalco sent me a nice rejection letter, but encouraged me to send in more samples. By the time the letter came, I had another job in animation so I never pursued it.

My Daredevil had these big Dirk the Daring feet. I thought it looked "real" at the time, but I had been drawing Dirk for so long it has skewed my sense of normalcy. DD's feet were huge.

DRAW!: What would you say that was the most important thing you got out of going to art school?

CB: The culture. I don't mean the culture from the book learning, but from the artists and faculty. My sense of what was good drawing, acting and design was focused by my relationships there. My design instructor, Bill Moore, often said that everything he taught was to be found in nature. He didn't draw, at least in class, but I learned more about drawing, animation and timing from him than any of my other instructors. He had this funny quote about people and art... that when people said that they didn't know much about art, but they knew what they liked, he said what they meant was that they liked what they knew... which wasn't very much. He made you want to keep searching and learning.



DRAW!: After you graduated from college, what were some of your first jobs? You mentioned you worked with Don Bluth for a while.

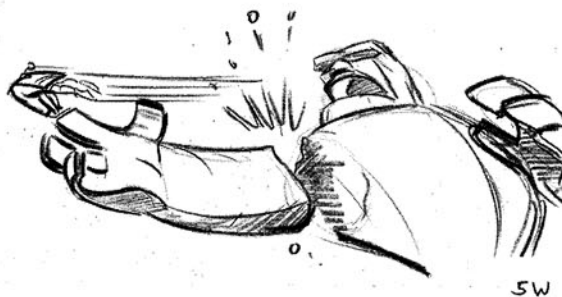
CB: I started as an assistant animator at a small studio doing short cartoons for about 6 months before it closed down. The owner went to jail on some kind of fraud charge or something and the studio was some kind of front. From there, I went to Bluth to animate on *Space Ace*. A bunch of my Cal Arts friends had found work over there and were actually animating, not just assisting. That was unheard of back then. Everyone knew you had to assist before you got to animate. *Space Ace* was a fun project to work on even if the atmosphere at Bluth's wasn't. The studio atmosphere felt cult-like to me and I had to work in a dark little annex that leaked in the rain. I worked on *Space Ace*, *Dragon's Lair II* and was starting work on a forth game when Bluth went out of business. I was there all of eight months.

For what it's worth, I think *Space Ace* was the best thing Bluth ever did. It was a great learning experience and a dream come true to be animating cartoony super-heroes and monsters right out of school. For the first time, animated super-heroes moved like super-heroes. Up until then, animated super-heroes might have resembled the characters from the comics, but they moved like cardboard cutouts. *Space Ace* moved how I thought

TOP: A Major Damage story sketch.

BOTTOM: Pre-viz painting by Alan Battino to establish the look of the cartoon.

LEFT: Pencil page from *Major Damage* comic.



super-heroes should move.

DRAW!: When did you start exploring the 3-D animation world? How did you go from doing Disney style 2-D to the world of 3-D computer animation?

CB: Right before Bluth closed down in the mid-'80s, I got a call from someone I had met a year or so earlier asking if I was interested in animating computer-generated spaceships. It wasn't character animation, but jobs were pretty scarce back then so anything that would pay the rent and give me another employable skill was pretty attractive.

The movie was called *Starchaser: The Legend of Orrin*, in 3-D. It was drawn in a horrible "realistic" style. All the humans moved like they had a steel rods for spines. I knew the movie was going to be junk, but I didn't care. I was getting paid to animate. After that project wrapped, I moved on to Disney as a full-time character animator on *The Great Mouse Detective*. I quit when it ended and went over to Digital Productions to pursue CG on the 3-D Mick Jagger video, *Hard Woman*, and the Marvel Productions logo featuring a chrome Spider-Man landing on a giant MP. Marvel used it on the end of their TV shows and videos.

One silly note, the exec/art director from Marvel Productions wanted Spidey chrome because that was the trendy thing to do in CG back then. The technical director and I, being comics fans, wanted to put Spider-Man in his red and blue suit. We lost the argument, but undaunted, the TD, Kevin Bjorke, put all kinds

ABOVE LEFT: Adjustments had to be made in the posing of Major Damage as he dodged the Tiki's foot. The wrecking ball as drawn wouldn't have communicated the necessary weight. The chain from Damage's fist to the ball had to hang relatively straight and couldn't curve the way Chris liked to draw it.

TOP: In the final animation where Damage rips the Tiki's arm from its socket, there is a definite tug before the shoulder shatters, giving the Tiki more weight and making the rip seem more painful.

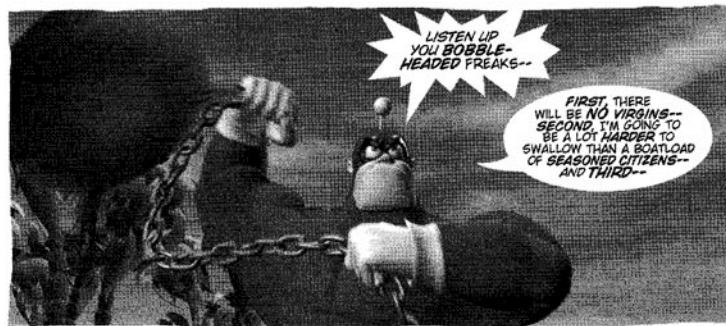
of red and blue lights on him to minimize the damage.

Digital closed down about a year after I got there. Luckily, I had been in contact with Disney and they asked me back to animate on *Oliver and Company*. I stayed there for the next ten years as an animator and started directing short theme park films and the theatrical short, *Runaway Brain*, starring Mickey Mouse.

Every now and then a CG job would come my way in-between the traditional assignments. The first was as animation supervisor for the live action film *Hocus Pocus*. I later directed the *Bug's Life* inspired theme park short, *It's Tough to be a Bug* and was animation supervisor on the films *Deep Rising*, *Mighty Joe Young* and *Inspector Gadget*.

DRAW!: Can you elaborate a bit on what the main challenges are in going from 2-D to 3-D animation? It seems like there

The TERROR of TIKI ISLAND!



ABOVE: In the cartoon, this sequence plays as silent. Doing a comic adaptation allowed Chris to give a voice and motivation to Damage and the Tikis.

must be a fair learning curve on the software. More drawing with a mouse than a pencil.

CB: The interface of most 3-D programs is not that hard to figure out. I learned to animate with MAYA just by looking over the shoulders of and working with the animators on *Mighty Joe Young*. Completely learning a 3-D software package is something else. While many have done it, they tend to excel in just one or two areas. That's why the CG business is so specialized. Studios would rather train an artist to use the computer than to try and turn a CG guru into an artist. Personally, I understand the modeling, lighting and rendering process, but I've only ani-

mated and directed for production.

The thing to remember is that animating is animating just as drawing is drawing. If you can draw, you can pose a character in the computer. If you can animate, you can animate using a computer. If you know how to light a practical scene, you can master lighting a virtual one. As with everything, it's all about the artist using the tool, not the tool itself.

The biggest problem I had getting used to in CG was that all the rotations and translations of the body joints were based on numbers. For example, if a character is standing toward you, its Y rotation would be 0. Make one rotation of 360 degrees and it would still be staring right at you, but when the computer in-betweens the poses, the character will spin completely around, animating it from 0 to 360.

My first shot was of a character sitting down in a chair. I posed the character all through the shot without regard to how I was getting it there. When I played back the animation, the character kept spinning around back and forth. She was going from 90 degrees to 270 and back to 90 again over and over.

Another tool that some traditional animators have a hard time with is the wave forms. Wave forms are graphs that illustrate the rotations and translations of each movable body part. A smooth wave reflects smooth animation. Fast changes in action, like a punch in the jaw will create a big jump in the wave from one frame to the next. By manipulating the size of the jump, the impact of the punch can be made stronger or weaker.

DRAW!: As an artist who spent a considerable amount of time drawing, do you ever find it frustrating when working in

3-D? In 2-D you just take your pen, or pencil and draw, but it seems like there are so many steps to "draw" something in 3-D.

CB: You're right that a lot goes into creating 3-D characters and environments, but simply posing a 3-D character is as fun and interactive as drawing. I'm amazed at the people who will build incredible models just to create one still picture, but that's not for me. My interest is in animating 3-D characters.

When I am animating a character in the computer, I get as lost in the scene as when I'm drawing. Think of it this way, no matter if you are drawing on paper or posing a model in the computer, you are working in 2-D, but thinking in 3-D. Drawing cheats are not easy to do in CG, but one doesn't have to worry about so many drawing problems with CG. Many times, when a



ABOVE: Melvin is kidnapped by the Mucus Men from Outer Space while trick or treating on Halloween night. They're harmless scientists on a tag-and-release mission who confuse Melvin in his costume for the emasculated comic book hero.

pose doesn't feel right in CG, by rotating it around in space, the mistake in the pose becomes obvious. I think my drawing helps my CG and working in CG helps my drawing.

DRAW!: When and where did you start thinking of *Major Damage*? Was this something you had been thinking about for a while? It's a great name and he has such an appealing design. You can see your love for the classic Marvel comics in his design as well as the classic Warner cartoons.

CB: I had just left Disney Feature Animation after *Hercules* when I drew out the original eight-page story. The idea was a combination of my interests that crashed together at the right time. Super-heroes, science-fiction, and kid-friendly fun... it's part *X-Files*, part Disney, and part "Superduperman". The name I had for some time, even though there was no character to go with it. I had animated on a character for Disney called General Knowledge and recall thinking up as many names as possible in that vein. Major Damage was my favorite.

Turning the *Damage* comic into a film was appealing for a lot of reasons. I had recently finished directing *Runaway Brain* for Disney and was anxious to direct something for myself. As great an experience *Runaway Brain* was, the studio process at Feature Animation moved very slowly and could be frustrating. Weeks can be spent debating the design of something like a chair that will only be seen for a couple of shots. I was craving to make something that could be done with a fair amount of dispatch.

Cartoon super-heroes have always appealed to me. Marie Severin's work in *Not Brand Echh!*, Bakshi's *Mighty Heroes*, Roger Ramjet, Megaton Man, "Superduperman," *The Tick*, they're all great. What I wanted to do with *Damage* was combine a traditional animation sensibility with cartoony super-hero action in 3-D.

DRAW!: Did you spend a lot of time on the development?

CB: Not really. There are details of Melvin's story outside the short film and comics story that have evolved, but the short film and comic are pretty much the same as they were created with one exception. For economic reasons, the original emphasis of the story was 90% monster-fighting super-hero and 10% cute little fanboy. When I showed my first story reel to a friend, he suggested that the interesting part was Melvin, the little boy and not the generic super-hero fight. It seemed backwards to him. As much as I wanted to just animate a lot of senseless violence, he was right, the short was pretty flat. I recut *Damage* to balance out 50% *Damage* and 50% Melvin, keeping the locations to a minimum so that the short would be economical to produce.

DRAW!: How did you go about fleshing out the story concept?

CB: There wasn't a lot of fleshing out to do as I saw the idea pretty clearly from the start. Melvin was originally conceived as

an eight-year-old little boy with a Walter Mitty-like fascination with Major Damage, a genetically engineered, monster fighting, comic book super-hero. I never experimented with Melvin being older or younger or if Major Damage should be more realistic. I knew what I wanted from the beginning. My limitation was time so I had to be as economical as possible. For the short situation to work, I had to establish Melvin's character, give him a minor conflict with his mother to help bring it out and show Damage beating the crap out of the Tiki Terrors. Period.

As an aside, ever since reading Stan and Jack's monster comics, I have wanted to animate a living Tiki. I loved Kirby's living Tikis wherever he used them. Kraa, the Unhuman; the Stone Men of Saturn... they were all living Tikis to me! *Major Damage* was a way to scratch my fanboy itch.

DRAW!: Yes, there is just something so cool about a giant stone-headed monster. Were you initially thinking of making it as a 2-D cartoon first?

CB: I'd thought about it, but given the traditional animation design, it seemed like a fresher approach to do *Damage* in 3-D. I recall being enthralled with the 3-D Viewmaster images of cartoon characters. The *Peanuts* characters looked so cool as little sculptures. It was that kind of appeal that I wanted to bring to *Damage*.

DRAW!: Was it planned as a short from the start?

CB: Yes and no, I always thought *Damage* was something that would make a great film or TV series, but I didn't do the short for a film presentation piece. I didn't even do the comic for publication, it was just another way to write the treatment. I thought it would be fun. The short was a natural progression from the comic. The characters were only half alive as still drawings. Like Dr. Frankenstein, I had to give them life.

THE PROCESS

DRAW!: Can you take us through the steps of taking *Damage* from a 2-D drawing into a 3-D character? I think many readers will find this process really fascinating.

CB: Starting with the *Major Damage* comic, I created a storyboard along with model sheets of the characters. I recorded a temp dialogue track in my house and cut the storyboards into an animatic using Adobe Premiere. When edited, the animatic played the still images of the storyboard in sync with the dialogue and in time to the finished piece.

Unfortunately, the technology didn't exist for me to make it as a one-man show and the *Damage* animatic sat in my studio a long time. I would tinker with the storyboards and location designs from time to time as a hobby, but there was no way for me to get it going without studio backing and that would mean giving up the rights. One day I was speaking on a panel with a bunch of animator types and there was a question from the audience if we had time for personal projects given the demands of our day jobs. I mentioned *Major Damage*. Afterwards, I was approached by independent film producer Kellie-Bea Cooper



© 2006 WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, INC.



© 2006 WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, INC.

TOP: Drawing for a friend inspired by *Runaway Brain*, where Mickey Mouse's brain is switched with that of a giant, Frankenstein-like Pete monster.

BOTTOM: Animation drawing of Nessus from the film *Hercules*.

who helped kick the project into high gear by getting hardware and software sponsors and enlisting a crew, not the least of which was Doug Cooper, an experienced CG supervisor. Doug loves cartoons and was our Mr. Spock of CG. Together, we represented the cornerstones of production.

Hewlett Packard's NT boxes were faster than what I used on *Mighty Joe Young* and as reliable as anything. Which was key for a non-technical type like myself. The software we used was MAYA by Alias. It was becoming the industry standard and I was familiar with it from working on *Mighty Joe*. Our compositing was done with SHAKE, by Nothing Real.

Armed with hardware and software, we had a kick-off party at my house and invited a bunch of interested friends and colleagues to look at the project and get commitments for work. Everyone left with a Major Damage t-shirt and about half of those actually ended up working on the show. Not a bad average, I think.

The first step was to establish the visual style of *Major Damage*. I tightened up a few key storyboard panels which were turned into previz paintings. They communicated the stylized reality I wanted in *Damage's* world. Nothing so photo-real that we would go crazy chasing every little realistic shadow, but real enough so that it looked like you could touch it. One of the ways we achieved our stylized reality was to use real textures, but use them out of scale for a cartoony look. For example, the weave on Major Damage's costume is larger than it would be in real life. It is the scale of real cloth on a 12" action figure. That helps make him cute, even though in real world terms, he is over 6' tall.

When it came time to build Damage himself, I drew him standing in a neutral pose from the front, back and side, like a rough blueprint. Then, Corey Smith, our incredibly talented 3-D modeler started to build him using MAYA. Corey imported scans of my drawings into the 3-D program and created the wireframe of Damage by "tracing" the silhouette of Damage. Once the front and side outlines of Damage were in the computer, it was a matter of creating more points and pushing them around until Damage looked like Damage. It was truly virtual sculpting. A "mouth bag" was created so that when Damage opened his mouth, you wouldn't see the inside of his head. Eyes and a tongue were created as separate objects so they could move independent of the head.



ABOVE: Personal drawing of Silent Bob and Jay with a Spider-Man theme. Chris was exploring ways to translate the flat animation designs into a more full, comic book look.

Since my drawings were fairly loose, Corey had to make little changes as he went, which was no problem as he is an artist in his own right. He would e-mail me jpegs of Damage every few days and I would make little suggestions using Photoshop to this or that. We would go back and forth until I felt it was ready to final. Then I would go to his house and we would work together putting the finishing touches on.

A cool thing about the 3-D sculpting program is that it's possible to zoom in on and around the character to focus on any angle or detail. This helps when making slight design changes so that the character looks good from any angle.

The next step was create a skeleton. Without that, Damage was just a "shell." After that, points on the body were "bound" to points on the skeleton so that the skin would move along with the bones. There was a short back and forth process of my testing the rig, giving feedback, having revisions done, etc... but it came together pretty quickly.

I don't like a lot of controls for a character. I'd prefer to

have fewer controls that are smarter than a lot of different controls. One control that moves the chest area and bends the lower back is better than five controls for spine. I also like my rigs to follow a human skeleton as much as possible. I figure that nature has worked out the problems already and it's unlikely a CG artist is going to improve upon it. Unfortunately, many of the rigs I've seen people build and animate with seem based on toy action figures and not people. It is impossible to get believable animation from a model like that because the shoulders and hips will not allow you to create a natural pose.

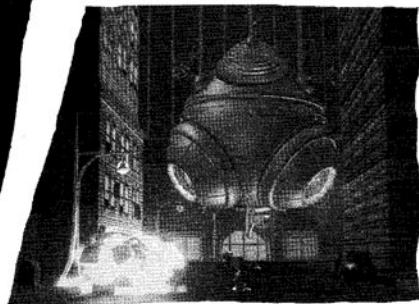
The final step was to create the facial expressions. We modeled about 8-10 facial expressions that could be mixed and matched to give the animators whatever shape was needed. To me, it was more important that the face be able to communicate the attitude of the character more than to articulate every little sound. Acting doesn't come from mouth shapes anyway. Look at the Muppets; best acting in the world and they just open and close their mouths!

When modeling mouth shapes, it is very important to incorporate the character's cheeks into all mouth shapes. If only the mouth moves and you cannot feel the forces pushing and pulling against the eyes, the animation will look dead. The cheek and brow animation must also change the shape of the eye when they animate or the animation will be stiff and unexpressive. All animation is based on the change of shape. The Tiki Terrors were designed by Jim McPherson. He was an accomplished traditional sculptor with credits on *MIB*, *Mighty Joe Young* and *Gremlins*, looking to get into CG. Jim did his own thing with the Tiki Terrors. He took the scale of my Tikis from the storyboard and tossed the rest. With garage projects like this, it's important for everyone to get something creative out of it since there is no money involved. For Jim, it was to create his own design for the Tiki Terrors. They ended up a terrific amalgam of Jack Kirby, the Moai of Easter Island and African sculpture. The only thing his Tikis had in common with mine besides their size was their Thing-like brow.

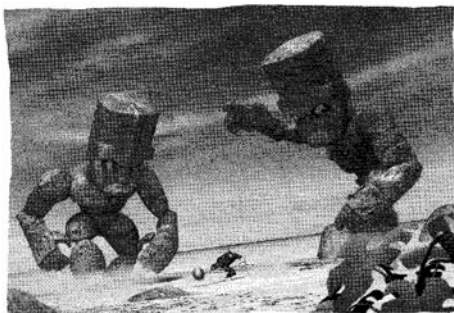
For Melvin's room, I drew a simple floor plan for scale and a general layout for the props and furniture. Armed with a stack of clip art of children's bedroom furniture, CG layout artist, Harald Kraut fleshed out the design. Harald also built the Tiki island and served as our head of layout, basing the design of the island on the compositions in my loose storyboard drawings. The final voice recording was done in a professional studio. My



**FASTER THAN A SPEEDING COMET!
MORE POWERFUL THAN AN ALIEN
DEATH MACHINE!**



**...ABLE TO LEAP TALL TIKIS
IN A SINGLE BOUND!**



**GENETICALLY ENGINEERED
MAN OF TOMORROW!
PROTECTING THE INNOCENT
FROM MUTANTS,
MONSTERS AND ALIEN
SCUM, IT'S...**



ABOVE: Depicting Melvin as a drawn image on this splash helped to establish his vivid imagination of Major Damage's world.

son Kevin played Melvin and my wife, Denise was Mom. My daughter Brittney played a Mucus Man from Outer Space, but her part was unfortunately cut due to time constraints.

Once our models were build and we had sets for the characters to act in, I posed out the characters in a 3-D animatic. The shots were now ready for the animators to animate. The production process was pretty straight forward from this point. I would

© 2006 WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, INC.



LEFT: Animation drawing of Nessus laughing at Hercules from the film *Hercules*.

BOTTOM: Animation drawing of Scat Cat from the Paula Abdul video *Opposites Attract*. Chris served as the lead animator and character designer.

do a hand-out either by e-mail or phone and when the respective artist needed feedback, they would upload the shot or lighting test to our online File Depot and I would check it from home. Every morning, I would answer e-mails and give feedback before going to work. After work, I would start animating shots myself and answer e-mails until going to bed. Once in a while, the crew in LA would get together to work, but most of our work was done at home over the Internet.

The process of building the models, sets and roughing out the 3-D animatic took about 6 months and the rough animation took another 6 months (that may seem a long time, but we all had day jobs working on films or TV shows). We previewed *Major Damage* as a work in progress at Siggraph in New Orleans in August of 2000 and got a good response. At that time, the short had only two final rendered shots, zero effects animation and the characters had no capes.

We came back from Siggraph all charged up and ready to finish the short, but were having trouble finding time to work on it. All of the crew seemed to be in a crunch on their day jobs. Work sometimes stopped for weeks and some crew members thought that the short had been abandoned. Two things happened to save us. One, reels from people who saw us at Siggraph started to come in with offers of help, and two, several CG animators, hobbyists, and teachers answered a post I made at CG-char.com asking for help. At the end of the day, about a hundred CG artists from all over the world contributed something big or small to *Major Damage*. For some, it was just a prop model like a ball. Others, like Renee Dunlop, lit and textured Melvin's room completely by herself, outfitting Melvin's room with *Major Damage* bed sheets, curtains and lunch box. Comic artist Erik Larsen contributed a hi-res image of a *Savage Dragon* poster for the back of Melvin's door, too.





TOP: Animation drawing of Hercules about to face off against Nessus.

BOTTOM: Publicity drawings of Kim Possible, Ron Stoppable, and Rufus, the naked mole rat, for upcoming TV series *Kim Possible*, airing in June on the Disney Channel. Drawing by Troy Adomitis.



When the show was complete, I approached composer Jim (Powerpuff Girls; Clerks, the Cartoon; Samurai Jack) Venable to score *Damage* and he said “yes” before I even finished asking. Scott Mosier, one of the the exec-producers I worked with on *Clerks, the Cartoon*, introduced me to Gary Rizzo, a sound designer at Skywalker Sound who agreed to do my mix. He and his crew gave my little mini-short a feature film sound.

The final cherry on top was when Kellie-Bea Cooper arranged a meeting with Gary *Space Ghost* Owens to possibly narrate the opening title sequence. He was very complimentary about the work and agreed immediately.

MISC. ANIMATION FUN

In the opening title sequence of *Major Damage*, I have Damage whirling the wrecking ball over his head like Thor’s hammer and leaping over the heads of the Tiki Terrors. The idea came from how I thought Marvel’s Thor flew as a kid. I didn’t think Thor was actually flying when he flew, I thought that he just trailed behind his hammer after throwing it. That’s how I wanted Damage to fly; completely out of control, unable to change his path or direct his landings. I imagined him accidentally landing on cars and creating big craters in the street and generally creating major damage wherever he went.

A big question I had going into the shot would be if it would look convincing in 3-D. In 2-D, you’d buy the action in a heartbeat because 2-D animation is such an abstraction. But in 3-D, because the world is “real,” I was concerned that the action was look forced and be unbelievable. The key was to sync Major Damage’s leap into the air while throwing the wrecking ball straight up. As long as Damage followed the path of the wrecking ball, it looked like he was being pulled behind it and not flying under his own power. It’s probably my favorite shot I animated in the piece.

On a trivia note, I staged the shot and posed Damage in mid-leap after the Superman in the Fleischers’ *Superman* cartoon titles.

DRAW!: Are there things that you have to eliminate—to change in the design—to make the character work within the limits of the technology?

CB: *Major Damage* is about half as long as I originally intended. A big hurdle was modeling and lighting the many locations I wanted him in, so we cut back. I originally had Melvin trick-or-treating on a busy neighborhood street in the first version. That alone could have taken 6 months!

It’s not so much that the technology is limited because you can do anything. It is just time-consuming. Unfortunately, our spare time was as sparse as could be. So one area we compromised in was that Damage didn’t have skin and muscles that jiggle like the dinos in *Jurassic Park*. Damage and Melvin move more as super-flexible Gumbys.





DICK GIORDANO

DICK GIORDANO ON INKING COMICS



AUTHOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately, the printed page isn't the best forum for instruction on inking. Since I won't be able to "show" you much, I'll have to "tell" you most. Thanks for your patience and understanding.

Inking is an art form. Some people might have a problem with that statement. Heck, some of the uninitiated don't even know what inking is... and that includes some folk who are into comics as well as those who are not. When I explain to the average person what I do as an inker, a typical response runs along the lines of: "Oh, I see! What you do is trace the pencil drawing in ink!" Well, yes... and no! While "tracing" pencil drawings in ink is a necessary first step in order to reproduce pencil drawings, inking them is not merely tracing them.

Today, the inker makes a valid (often-invaluable) contribution to the finished art... or he probably won't be inking for long.



ABOVE: Editor Mike Manley's pencils from *Batman* #509, inked by Giordano.

Historical Sidebar: Comic book inking at the onset of the industry tended to be somewhat crude. The rudimentary reproduction process didn't take kindly to artistic fine-linework but handled heavy-handed linework well. As reproduction techniques improved, so did the quality of the inking which evolved into a highly refined art form that put everything needed on the paper (special effects, lighting, etc.) in black and white. The better inkers were trying in this way to reduce the negative effects of poor coloring. Their art was thought to be color-proof.

Today, of course, we live in a high-tech time where computer color separations produce such beautiful results that it is no longer necessary for the inker to put everything on the art board. Computer color art rules!

Having said all that, I feel that before I proceed I must emphasize that the following exploration of inking and inking techniques is not the right approach or the best approach... it is

merely my approach. Many editors in the business today obviously are not smitten with my approach. My last regular DC inking gig (*Power of Shazam!*) ended nearly three years ago and my very brief *Thor* run ended after just four issues (I believe) when John Romita, Jr. stepped down from penciling that title more than a year ago. I think though, that my approach to the process of inking is still primarily valid and with the addition of your personal bells and whistles, may well lead you to a rewarding career... or at least, an improvement in your skill level. Onward!

GOALS

The primary goal of a comics inker is to ink the work in front of him as well as it can be inked and to complete the work on time. Your definition of quality work must include timely completion. You can't say "do you want it good; or do you want it Thursday?" The obvious response (and I've used it) is "I want it good and I want it Thursday!" If you're not capable of doing that, you have an obligation to make that known to your client. (Aside: I have often found that the client will find a little leeway in "Thursday." That will allow you the extra time you need and allow him to work with the artist he had originally assigned it to. It's a win/win strategy that works if you're honest about your capabilities.) A secondary goal will be to fully understand the needs of a particular job. This sometimes requires reading signs and/or interpreting what your client describes as his needs; your client often isn't an artist and cannot clearly articulate what he is looking for. Often examining the penciled art closely will provide clues to what needs to be done. Take nothing for granted. Be alert.

PROCESS

Again, may I stress the following is my process. Doesn't work for everyone and very few inkers that I know (the "older" ones) follow all the points on my procedural list. Maybe none of them do. Still at the risk of appearing hide-bound, it is a procedure that I've followed for decades... and still do.

READ THE JOB: If it's unlettered, I ask for the plot or the script. I need to know what's happening (good guys, bad guys, time of day, locale, etc.) before I start inking.

If it's unlettered I make my own. If the job has already been lettered, I ask my client for a set of copies made before being lettered. I work better if I know what those lines that go up to the balloons and come out the other side are. Most letterers erase balloons after lettering often leaving a "halo" around the balloon. This missing art is important for me to know.

GET PHOTOCOPIES OF THE PAGES

GET SCRAP IF CHARACTERS OR LOCALES IN YOUR STORY HAVE APPEARED IN PREVIOUS ISSUES:

This helps me maintain the continuity of the story. The pencil art, tone and goal of the story, and your client's input are factors in determining a stylistic approach.

IN ORDER

I START ON PANEL 1 PAGE 1 AND INK PANELS IN ORDER: I like to ink the story in the way that the reader will read it. Helps keep consistency and continuity.

BASIC TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS. DECIDE ON AN APPROPRIATE INK STYLE TO EMPLOY:

ALL PEN: Of course, you fill large black areas with a brush. Filling in blacks with a pen is a sickness! This style works well if your job is to be color separated by a no-holds-barred computer operated by a color artist who knows what he's doing.

ALL BRUSH: Proof of my Dinosaurism! When I started working professionally in the early '50s, all or nearly all the cartoonists inked their work primarily with a brush. It was faster and produced linework that was bold enough to be reproduced, while still enhancing and retaining the integrity of the pencil art. Those of us of that bent often claimed "we draw with our brush." Among the popular syndicated cartoonists of that day that used a brush to ink the majority of their work were Milton Caniff, Frank Robbins, Will Eisner, and Alex Raymond, (though Raymond used a fair amount of pen, especially in *X-9* and *Flash Gordon*).

PEN AND BRUSH: Obviously allows you to draw on the best stylistic qualities of both tools. I've done several jobs lately using pen to do the basic drawing (heads, hands, outlining foreground elements and inking backgrounds completely, or nearly so). Then I went back in with a brush and inked elements like folds and hair, accented the pen outlines to account for light source and filled in large black areas. This style was more illustrative than modern comic book inking.

* Of course, there are infinite variations on how you can utilize these techniques. A Chinese menu approach, (one from Column A, one from Column B) can lead you to a variation that will work for you.

TOOLS I USE:

PENS—NON DIP: I regularly use 2 types of non-dip pens that are reliable and provide fixed-width lines:

1) Rotring Rapidoliner. Set of 4 in sizes .25, .35, .50 and .80 mm widths. This pen comes with a metal tip with a valve operation similar to a regular Rapidograph but doesn't clog as easily. Cleaning by shaking the valve in the barrel is much quicker so you can start working seconds after removing the cap. When you run out of ink you merely pop a new ink cartridge in which comes with a brand new point. The regular Rapidograph has a refillable cartridge—same old (clogged) point!

2) Staedtler Pigment Liner. Set of 4 in sizes .01, .03, .05 and .07 mm. These pens have felt tips, can't be refilled but start working immediately and continue to do so until they run out of ink and you toss it.

The felt tip makes for a softer line and you can get a bit of thick and thin easily with a bit of pressure, holding the tip at an angle or using double lines. This is a superior drawing pen to the Rotring but the Rotring metal point gives a more consistent weight line when using a straight edge, circle guide, french curve or ellipse guide.

DIP PENS: I've used quite a few. At various times, one nib or another has been my favorite. The two pens that I've consistently felt the most comfortable with over the years have been the Gillotte 404 (not very flexible, even weight line) and the Gillotte 170 (fairly flexible, providing a clean thick and/or thin line without too much pressure). There are other nibs available that are more flexible but most will break easily when you apply heavy pressure. The real Gillotte nibs are brass colored and very hard to find. More readily available, but not as good are Gillott (notice no "e" at the end) which are black metal and a knock-off of the original. They're okay—just not as good. Whichever dip pen you choose, a certain amount of care is necessary to keep them working efficiently. You can easily use a nib-a-day if you're careless. Don't drop them or toss them down, don't allow ink to build up on either top or bottom surface or the little hole that allows the ink to flow off your pen tip. I clean mine by dipping in water (sometimes as often as every panel) and gently blotting on a soft cloth. (save your old underwear shirts). When the ink build-up gets ahead of me, I'll gently scrape it off with a sharp single-edge razor blade.

BRUSHES: Ah, brushes! I use only brushes made with Kolinsky Sable. For inking (and whiteout) I skip around between sizes #2, #3, and #4. You actually can ink as fine a line with #4 as you can with the #2... and the #4, being larger, goes further between dips. The #4 will tend to die sooner, though, losing its snap and point. Whatever size I'm "hot" for at a given moment. The brands I'm most comfortable with are Raphael and Windsor & Newton, Series 7. I seem to get about the same performance and longevity from both and the Dick Blick catalogue lists the Raphael #2 at \$16.49 and the Windsor & Newton, Series 7 #2 at \$17.95. Hard to make a choice. I alternate. I ink 30 to 60 pages with a single brush. Even at the minimum 30 pages, your brush costs a bit over 50 cents a page. Cheaper brushes may seem a bargain to some—they seem a big gamble to me. I'd rather have the peace of mind of proven performance and 50 odd cents a page isn't exactly betting the farm.

INK: Bad times for a brush artist. Years ago there was an ink called Artone Extra-Dense Black. I heard that Higgins didn't care for the competition so they bought them out and came out with a new formula that was similar to Artone's and called it Higgins Black Magic. Well, the years passed, they continually altered the formula (perhaps to suit a clientele other than cartoonists) until today it is neither "magic" nor "black." To add insult to injury, they are now selling Black Magic only in 1 oz. bottles. At least with pint or quart bottles, as the ink aged, it

heaved up. The 1 oz. bottles dry up before they can age—and you're left with a large number of 1 oz. non-degradable plastic bottles to dispose of. The ink is so gray, that you have to re-ink much of the job after erasing it. Large black areas also require a second coat. Sidebar: Higgins also sells a regular Higgins ink. It doesn't say Black Magic on the box. It isn't black (or magic) either and I swear the same ink is in both bottles—a feeling that is enhanced by most Black Magic ink boxes come with a Black Magic label pasted over the otherwise same box as the regular Higgins ink!

Oh, woe is me (us?!)

Pelikan sells an ink that is blacker than Higgins but it is very flat. Even gray Higgins has a pretty good gloss to it. Looks better in the original and the better reflective surface reproduces better.



ABOVE: Stephanie Starr pencils and inks by Giordano (assisted by Joe Rubinstein and/or Terry Austin at Continuity Associates.) From Mike Friedrich's *Star*Reach* magazine.

GIORDANO: "One of my few successful all pen forays. A minor amount of brushwork on accents and, of course, filling in flat areas of black."

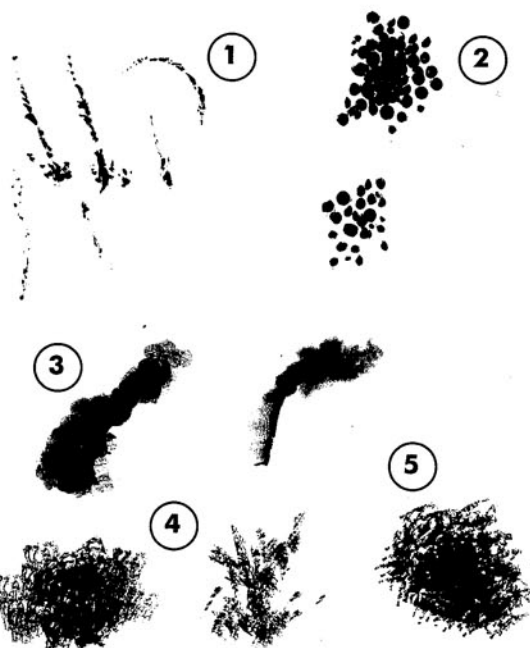
WHITE PAINT: I find Pelikan Graphic White works best for me in making ink corrections or whitening out unwanted lines. It's opaque, doesn't crack or peel and you can work over it with brush or pigment liners mentioned earlier. And what beats all is: no matter how hard it becomes in the bottle if you let it dry out, all you need do is add a bit of water, replace the cap, give it a shake and let it sit overnight. In the morning shake it vigorously a few times and *voila!* You have your white paint back with all of its original properties! When I throw out an empty bottle of Pelikan Graphic White, it's empty!!

TEMPLATES, GUIDES: Take my word for it... you need them. A set of compasses, triangles, French curves, circle and ellipse guide sets, and straight edges in various sizes. I have a nifty ellipse set that stores the guides in a loose-leaf binder. Keeps them clean, in order and easily at hand. Put out by Pickett, set no. 1224 is comprised of guides from 10 to 80 degrees in sizes most commonly used by comic inkers. These are all easy to come by and inexpensive when you consider they're a lifetime purchase. A good compass set will produce the best results and, with care, will last a lifetime (I still have the compass set I bought in 1949 and it works swell). Make certain that the triangles or other straight edges that you choose have a beveled edge so the ink won't creep under the edge and smudge.

This doesn't come close to covering all the ground I hoped to cover. Time and space limitations and all... but, I hope you've found the above useful and/or interesting. If I've been unclear at some point or if you have a question on some area that I haven't addressed, I would not be opposed to taking up your issue one-on-one. Please don't write or phone. I already get too much mail and the Postal Service is considering a legal remedy. And I'm hearing impaired so phones don't work well for me or my callers. But fax—ah fax! And don't be upset if my reply is less than instantaneous... I still have to work for my daily bread.

Fax: (386) 446-3278—and please don't waste my time with anything other than comic book inking issues.

Thank you and good afternoon.



SEMI-LIKE ART TOOLS:

ART TOOLS THAT DON'T COME IN THE ART SUPPLY STORE.

1. Cellophane: With a brush, ink on the back of a piece cellophane. The ink will separate into various size globules of ink. Turn it over and press onto a piece of paper. Uses are manifold; dirt from a horse's hoof as it strikes the ground, water spray, etc. With imagination other uses will present itself. Also works with white paint.

2. New Pencil Erasers: Dip in ink, apply. Kirby Dots.

3. Your thumb or finger: Spread or model wet ink edges for a variety of effects. Warning: do not do this if you're a wanted criminal! Your fingerprints will be on the printed page.

4. Sponges: Cut wedges or small rectangles from various types of sponges. Put ink on it and apply to paper either patting it or pressing it down. Various effects.

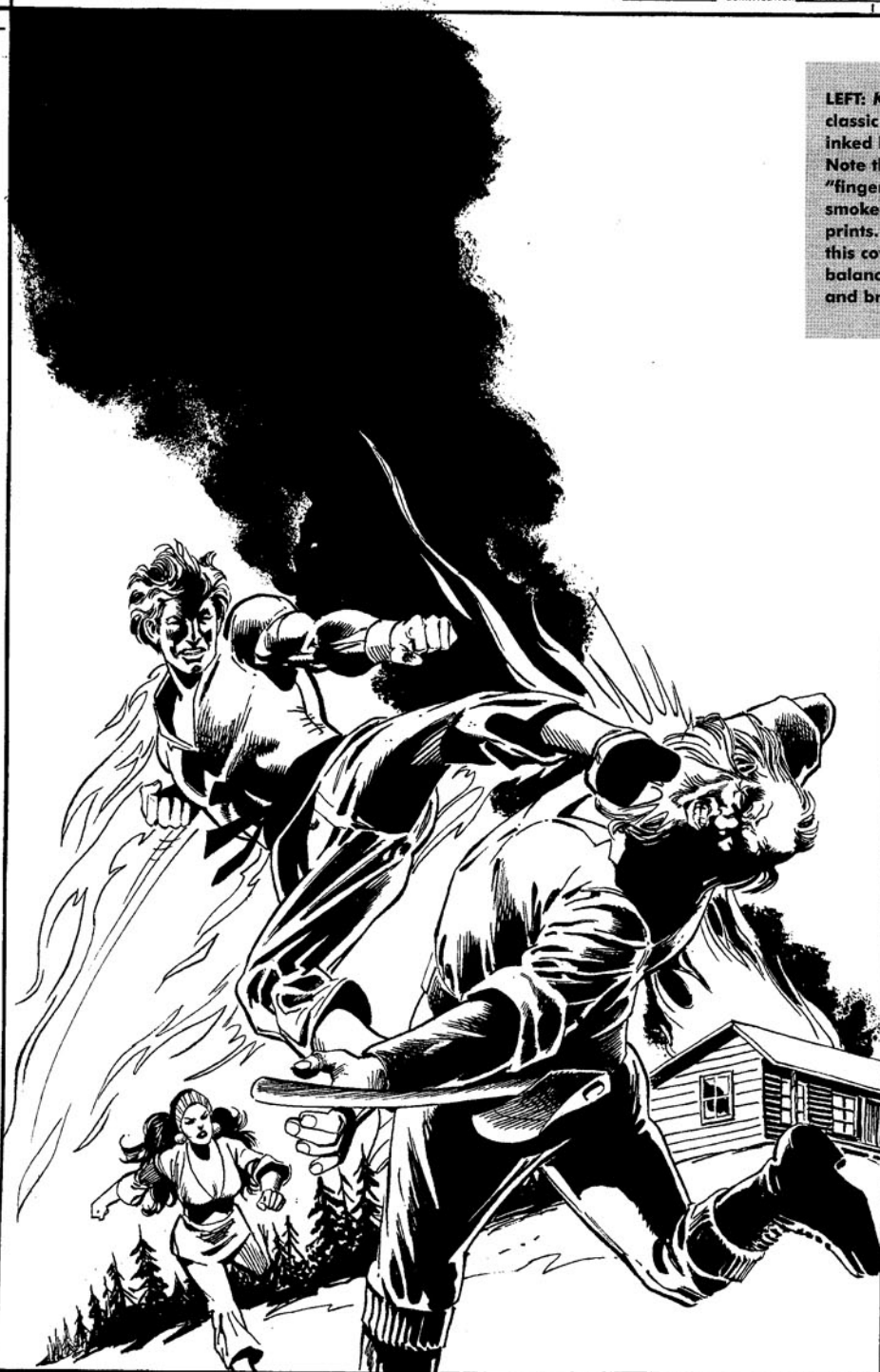
5. Rubber Cement: Spread some (with the brush that comes with the bottle) at the water's edge of the panel with a beach. Let dry. Ink over the rubber cement. Let dry, rub off rubber cement. Interesting.

All of these techniques take a bit of thought and some practice but the effects you can achieve will be worth the effort.

SPARTA

Cover Title KUNG FU FIGHTER Month JULY
No. 10 Identification Z-329

LEFT: *Kung-Fu Fighter*, a classic cover penciled & inked by Giordano. Note the use of "finger painting" in the smoke using fingerprints. Giordano inked this cover using a balance of both pen and brush.



ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



SARGE STEEL AND JONNI THUNDER TM DC COMICS

LEFT: Sarge Steel from *Who's Who*, penciled and inked by Giordano. Note the heavy use of pen on the background which contrasts with the heavier, juicier line of the brushwork on the figure giving the finished piece a lot of depth and texture.

BELOW: Jonni Thunder from another *Who's Who* illustration, penciled and inked by Giordano.

GIORDANO: "These two pages from *Who's Who* don't make much of a statement about inking, but I like them."





DC COMICS INC.

 Cover Title *PK 1/10/89* Month *Jan*
 No. *6-6* Identification *1*

1/8/89



3 NEW FEATURES DEBUT!

ACTION

COMICS WEEKLY

 NO. 636
 \$1.50
 CAN \$2.00
 U.K. 60p

- LOGO AREA -

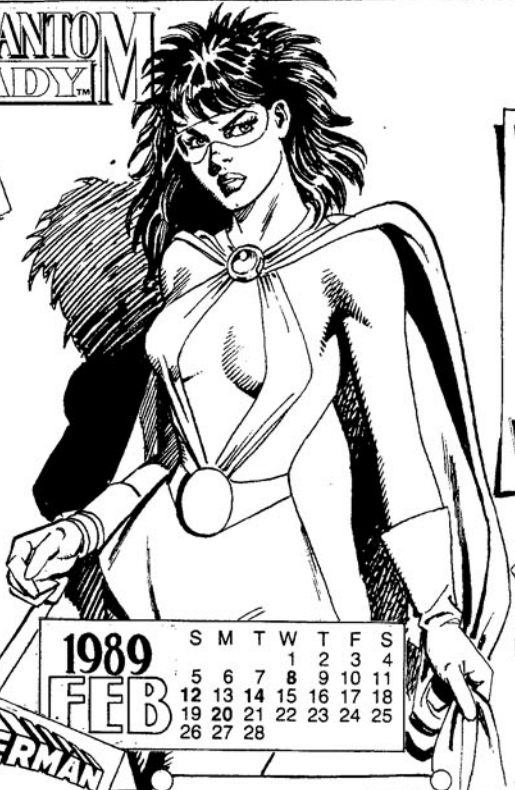
- LOGO AREA -

YELLOW TS

RED TS

UPC BOX POSITIONS
BI-PRO:
**PHANTOM
LADY™**
**COVER
LATE!**

 Dick,
 Call
 The
 Office

 Call
 Home

WANTED

WILD DOG™
al Penet

DEMON™

"Normally like the rest of
 Dave's work 'The Devil's Dis-
 ciple' is somewhat 'flat' on
 human feeling, passion or poet-
 ry, yet the delightful craftsmen-
 ship and stable wit charac-
 teristic of his writing is here. Hor-
 rifically it is unadorned with the
 pseudo-intellectual display that

1989	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
FEB	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	26	27	28				

SUPERMAN™

SPEEDY™

 ARTIST(S):
 SUPERMAN, THE PHANTOM LADY, SPEEDY, THE DEMON, WILD DOG™ DC COMICS

COLORIST:

EDITOR:

ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 DC COMICS



TOOLS—TECHNIQUE

ABOVE: More pencils by *DRAW!* editor Mike Manley from *Batman* #509.

LEFT: The same page inked by Giordano showing his masterful skill at texture and drapery. Mostly brush with small details and backgrounds in pen.

TOP RIGHT: Pencils and inks by Giordano. Heads, hands, outline all inked in pen. All the rendering was done with a brush.

BOTTOM RIGHT: *Last Kiss* #2. Pencils and inks by Giordano.

GIORDANO: "This is a neo-stylized version of the style I used on Mike Sekowsky's *Wonder Woman*. The major difference is mostly the pen backgrounds with brush-work accents."

THE CRUSTY CRITIC



PERMANENT DRAWING MARKERS

We live in a glorious, modern age. Science has given us just about every gadget, toy and comfort we could have ever dreamed of. Unfortunately, the commercial artist's tools of the trade have been largely neglected. The search for the perfect brush, pen or even paper, is an ever-increasingly difficult chore. Many artists are adapting, using computers more and more rather than struggling with inferior traditional supplies. For most of us, though, there is still some value in knowing which supplies are well-made and where to get them.

Thus, the Crusty Critic vows to scour the globe (or at least the Internet) to find the finest and most affordable art supplies available to the modern-day cartoonist. I shall examine every sable brush hair, drag every pencil across every sheet of Bristol board, and smudge every ink... so that you don't have to!

First, though, I should make it clear that the opinions you'll find in this column are just that. I will make every effort to be as objective as I can. Whenever possible, the tools here will be judged impartially and using uniform standards. It is inevitable, though, for some subjectivity to find its way into the equation. The pen that fits my hand most comfortably may cause blisters for others. The ink which pleases my eye may be offensive to some. This humble critic can only present the options and offer his honest appraisal. It's up to you to find out if you agree.

This issue's column will be dedicated to markers. Once reserved for sketching and drawing on the road, it seems that markers are now being used more and more in the studio. The quality and diversity of markers has vastly improved over the

last decade. The inks are more permanent, and there are a wide array of sizes and points. There are also a number of good brush-markers available, giving cartoonists the flexibility of a brush in a clean, portable package. The Crusty Critic hit the virtual market of the Internet to find as many brands as possible, and found a lot of good markers... and a few great ones.

THE MARKERS

There are so many markers available today, that I had to limit myself somehow. I decided to test only disposable markers. I did not include any product that had a replaceable ink cartridge. That excluded a few nice brush-pens, and some technical pens that use cartridges. For the most part, I ended up with disposable technical pen-style markers. These pens are sized like Rapidographs, generally from about 0.1 mm to 0.8 mm in thickness. I also found a few nice brush-markers, which feature a



Image #1: Ordway Pencils

I scanned the pencils as a bitmap at 600 dpi. After saving, I converted the image to grayscale, and then RGB. I then used the magic wand and the "select similar" command to select all of the black pixels, which were then filled with a light blue. I printed the image on a good sheet of Bristol, which I had cut down to fit my inkjet printer. I selected a paper with just a bit of tooth. The smoother the paper, the longer the drying time.

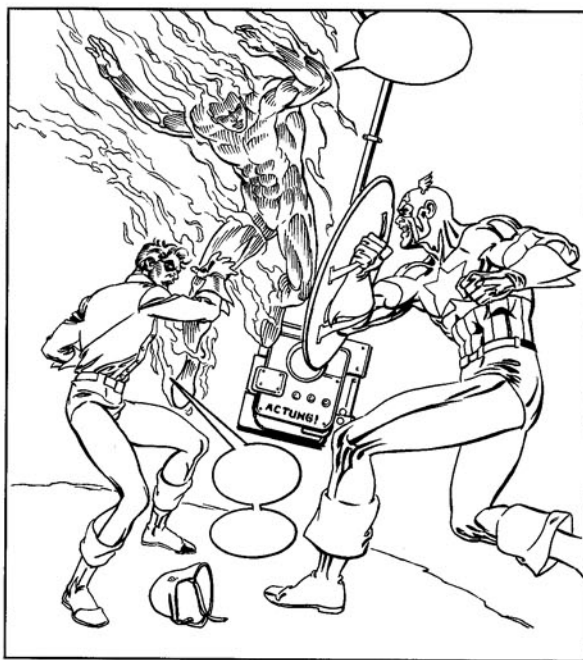


Image #2: Ordway Inks Step 1

Using all of the technical pen markers, I went through the drawing, doing as much linework as possible. The Zig Millennium pen quickly became my favorite tool. I used sizes ranging from .01 mm to 0.05 mm. The 0.08 size even came in handy for some ruling and the word balloons. I left feathering, textures, and black areas for the brush stage.

synthetic, flexible brush head. Finally, I found one marker which I love, but which doesn't fit into either of those categories.

When choosing which pens to test, I did not include anything that wouldn't be available to readers nationwide. I was able to order every one of these products online, and I also graded the stores from which I ordered. I was not able to find a few pens I have used and liked in the past... most notably Staedtler's Pigment Liners. They may still be available, but several hours of searching and an e-mail to Staedtler through their website did not produce results. I also decided to only review pens that used permanent ink.

The Crusty Critic can't afford to have his masterpieces ruined by his adoring, but sometimes sweaty, fans.

TECHNICAL PENS REVIEWED

(in alphabetical order):

- Alvin Tech Liner
- Copic Multi-Liner
- Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pen

- Neo Piko
- Sakura Pigma Micron
- Zig Millennium

BRUSH-PENS REVIEWED

(in alphabetical order):

- Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pen (size B is a brush)
- Sakura Pigma Brush
- Copic Multi-Liner Brush

OTHER PENS REVIEWED:

- Fountain Pentel

TECHNICAL PENS REVIEWED

I put these pens through some pretty rigorous testing in the Crusty Critic laboratory. I won't bore you with the details, but suffice it to say they were a lot of smudged pieces of paper littering the floor by the end of the day. I was particularly interested in drying time. In other words, how long does the ink remain wet after the mark is made. This was crucial to me. One of the advantages to using markers is their immediacy. If I'm going to wait around all day for the ink to dry, afraid of smearing each mark, I'd just as soon use a crowquill pen and real India ink.

Using the same size of each pen, I made similar marks, and then tried to smear the ink after one, three, five and seven seconds. I was easily able to narrow my search for the perfect marker, as several of the pens took over five seconds to dry. Three pens dried in five seconds or less, and moved on to the finals: the Faber Castell, the Sakura Micron, and the Zig Millennium. Of those, the Zig and the Micron seemed to dry the fastest.

I was also concerned with the light-fastness of the ink. I don't want my drawings fading away over time. I was pleased to see that all of the pens tested seemed very immune to fading when placed in direct sun for long periods of time. None of these inks are as black as a good India ink, but they are certainly dark enough to reproduce. Of all of the pens, the Alvins appeared blackest to my eye. Those pens, however, took a long time to dry. Nothing happened during the tests for light-fastness to change my opinion after the smudge tests... the Zig and the Micron still seemed to be the best.

So, it was time to put nylon to paper and see how these pens performed. I scanned a copy of some Jerry Ordway pencils, and went to work. I chose a paper that was pretty smooth, but with a little bit of tooth. The smoother the paper, the longer the drying time. If the paper is too rough, it may be harder to get a smooth line.

It didn't take me long to figure out which pens I liked inking with best. It may seem redundant, but the Zig and the Micron stood out. They were easy to handle, and they come in a wide variety of sizes. I found myself inking with one hand, and holding a fistful of the pens in the other... switching whenever I needed to change the line weight. In the end, the Zig was my favorite. It seemed to dry the fastest, and was easy to handle. The Micron was also excellent, but it would bleed on occasion.

So, my favorite of the pens reviewed was the Zig



CAPTAIN AMERICA, BUCKY AND THE HUMAN TORCH ARE TM AND © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS INC.

Image #3: Ordway inks final

As with the pens, it didn't take long for me to identify my favorite brush. The Faber-Castell gave me an excellent line and dried quickly. I used it to finish off the drawing. After that, I went back through to make a few small corrections. My standard white-out fluid (Pen Opake) covered all of the markers without a problem.

Millennium. They dry quickly, come in a wide variety of sizes, hold their point well, and are a pleasure to draw with.

They are also widely available. I ordered mine online, but I have seen them at several art and craft supply stores. They are also among the cheaper pens. I was able to find them online for under two dollars each. The set of five that I bought cost \$8.99, before shipping.

**BRUSH-PENS
REVIEWED**

As I inked with the pens, their main drawback became clear... lack of line character. They may be swell for ruling lines, and even many kinds of drawing. For some things, though, you just need to create a different kind of line. I ordered a few markers with synthetic brush heads, and was quite pleased with some of the results.

It didn't take long to narrow the field. Two of these markers take a very long time to dry. I was only satisfied with the Faber Castelli. It dried amazingly fast, and gave me an outstanding line. I was able to get control I never dreamed of out of a disposable marker, from fine feathering to a number of different effects. The ink is also quite black. Overall, it's an amazing marker. The only drawback is that it appears to be available

only in a four-pen set. You'll get three technical pens with each brush. While the sets are reasonable, and I like the Faber-Castell technical pens, I prefer the Zigs. So, what to do with the extra pens you're forced to order? Patience, dear reader... we'll get to that later.

ONE MORE PEN REVIEWED

In my testing, I came across one pen that I liked, but wasn't able to immediately categorize. It's the Fountain Pentel. The tip of this marker is unique, allowing quite a bit of flexibility. I was able to get different line weights, which is not true of the other pens I reviewed. They don't stay sharp for long, so they're not appropriate for work that requires a lot of delicacy, but they're great for bolder stuff. I know a number of storyboard artists who swear by them.

These pens are not perfect, though. The ink does not appear to be permanent. They are not labeled as such, and the Pentel website doesn't mention permanent ink. When I tested them for smearing with a wet finger, they did not perform as well as the

other pens which did claim to use permanent ink. I wasn't willing to give up on these pens... so, what to do?

Then, it hit me. I had the Faber-Castell pens lying around. I'd heard that some artists replace the ink in their markers, so I decided to give it a shot. Markers are not full of loose ink. They use ink-saturated, cylindrical sponges to hold and transfer the ink to the point. I figured these pens, being approximately the same size, might have similar ink sponges.

I was able to remove the caps from the body of the two pens pretty easily. You'll find that a pair of pliers will do the job on the Faber-Castell, while using a razor to pry the cap off worked best on the Fountain Pentel. A few taps shook loose the pens sponges, and they were indeed about the same size. The Fountain Pentel's sponge is actually slightly shorter, so, when I placed the sponge from the Faber-Castell in the Pentel's body, I pushed it down firmly. If you attempt this operation, you'll notice that one end of the sponges has an indentation. That's the lower end, which fits over the point.

My new Franken-Fountain Pentel performs well. I've been drawing with it for several days, and the new, permanent ink is still flowing. It makes one wonder why they don't make it with permanent ink to begin with. I'm sure a Pentel sales rep will drop the Crusty Critic a note explaining the finer points of marker manufacturing. Until then, I'll just enjoy my new creation.

CONCLUSIONS

So, after doing all of that extensive research, did your humble Crusty Critic promptly heave all of his sable brushes and crowquill pens into the nearest lake? No. I'll stick with the traditional tools for most of my work for the time being. I was hoping the markers would speed up the inking process, but they actually seemed to slow me down. With a good pen (a Hunt 102, for example) I can get an incredible array of line weights and textures. Sure, it takes some time to dip the pen and wait for all of that ink to dry, but not as much time as I ended up spending switching from one size marker to another or from the pen marker to the brush marker.

For some artists, these pens could be a perfect tool. Mike Mignola, for example, uses a fine marker to do his linework before finishing the page with ink and brush. Paul Neary also uses markers to brilliant effect. It's up to you, dear reader, to experiment with these tools, and find out what best suits your needs. I hope this humble critic has been of some assistance. Until next time... Draw well, and carry a finely crafted stick.

PAPERS

Pens, pencils, brushes, markers... all of them are useless without a solid foundation. A comic artist needs a good piece of paper upon which to ply his trade. Without it, all of your beautiful drawings end up decorating your drafting table. It's true that some artists today are using computers to produce their work, bypassing paper altogether. Most of us, though, still count on a nice piece of bristol upon which to work.

Thus, your own humble critic again hit the internet, order-

ing as many different types of paper as he could lay his ink-stained fingers on. I ordered everything from cheap drawing pads to outrageously expensive illustration board. It didn't take long to figure out two things: I need to hit up TwoMorrows Publishing for an expense account, and only one type of paper was really appropriate for my purposes... bristol board. What is bristol board, exactly? Don't bother me with questions. What do I look like, some sort of paper geek? It's good for comic book work. That's all you need to know. Some of the cheap drawing pads featured paper with a nice surface, but I found them too flimsy for my purposes. Some of the illustration boards were fabulous to work on, but hardly feasible financially for the production of a comic.

Review Criteria

So, what exactly was I looking for in a paper? That one I can answer. There were four factors:

Surface Quality: Some artists like to work on a very smooth surface, while others prefer a rough paper (also said to have a lot of "tooth"). Personally, I like a paper with just a bit of tooth. If a paper is too smooth, it can be hard to pencil on, particularly with a hard lead. Smooth (or plate) surfaces also make effects like drybrush hard to achieve. On the other hand, if a paper has too much tooth, it can be tiring to ink on... either with a pen or brush. Brushwork on especially rough stock becomes tricky. It's often hard to get anything but a drybrush effect.

Thickness: Generally, this is referred to as ply. As with toilet paper (and I've seen some artists work on paper that toilet paper might favorably be compared to), the ply number refers to how many individual layers the manufacturer used to make the paper. A one-ply paper obviously has just one layer. I'll trust you to figure out how many layers comprise two-, three- and four-ply papers. The thickness of a paper is important for a number of reasons. A flimsy board can be very frustrating to work on. Some artists like to use electric erasers, or even a simple razor blade, for corrections. A one-ply paper would never hold up to those tools. Besides, who wants to produce originals as flimsy as a Kleenex? I decided to exclude any paper that wasn't at least two-ply. Three-ply papers cost more, of course, but are a pleasure to work on. Anything more than three-ply seems needlessly expensive for comic book work.

Ease of Use: A few companies are now offering specialized comic book papers, with dimensions and guidelines printed right on the pages. These papers are very similar to what publishers supply to their freelancers. Needless to say, these types of pre-printed boards are a lot more convenient than cutting large sheets and ruling your own paper. This convenience, though, does not come cheap.

Cost: Whether you're doing your first set of samples, or producing the one-hundredth issue of your self-published masterpiece, you want to work on a good piece of bristol. You don't, however, want to go broke buying the stuff. I found suitable boards in a wide range of costs. I'll offer my own opinions, but it will ultimately be up to you to decide how much you're willing to spend.

Types of Boards Reviewed

The papers I finally included in this review break down into three categories: pre-ruled boards made specifically for comic book production, large bristol sheets, and bristol pads.

Before we get to the judging, let me remind you of the Crusty Critic's standard disclaimer. The opinions you're about to read are those of one humble critic. My taste is impeccable. It is not, however, universal. Please, check out some of these papers yourself, and make your own determinations. I can only hope to help clarify what you're looking for in a paper, and point you in the right direction to find it.

Pre-Ruled Comic Book Boards

The most prominent supplier of this type of paper is Blue Line Pro (www.bluelinepro.com). They offer a wide variety of boards, from a cheap, entry-level paper to the best bristol:

Blue Line Pro Comic Book Art Boards

Surfaces available: Smooth

Thickness: Three-ply

Cost: packs of 24 list for \$15.95 (\$0.66 per page). Available in standard and full trim pre-ruled formats. If you've seen comic book paper for sale in a comic store, odds are it was this product. This paper offers beginners an easy way to get started. The pages are ruled in non-photo blue ink just as pages used by comics publishers. The pages are inexpensive and convenient. Unfortunately, the surface of the paper is difficult to work on, at best. Blue Line Pro recommends that, if you plan on inking on this paper, you use brush or marker. The reason for that advice is that this paper bleeds like crazy. Trying to use any kind of dip pen will produce nothing but frustration. I also had trouble with rapidographs and even some markers. Pencil could also be a problem. I didn't like the way this paper's waxy surface handled harder leads, and erasing produced an even worse surface.

I can't argue that this could be a good starter paper. It gives you a chance to see what dimensions you should be using, and it's probably pretty cool for a kid to be able to draw on paper that resembles what the pros use. I can't recommend it, though, for any serious purposes.

Blue Line Pro Premiere (Strathmore) Series Boards

Surfaces available: Smooth and regular

Thickness: Two- or three-ply

Cost: Packs of 12 sheets range from a list price of \$17 (for 300 series, two-ply) to \$57.75 (for 500 series three-ply). That's a range from \$1.41 to \$4.81 per page. Available in standard and full trim pre-ruled formats. This is Strathmore bristol, also pre-ruled for comic book use. In case you don't know, Strathmore is the most widely known maker of bristol boards. Every publisher I know of uses Strathmore paper. The brand is practically an industry standard. Strathmore makes three classes of bristol; 300, 400 and 500 series. All are good, acid-free bristol. The 400 series has a slightly nicer surface than the 300. The 500 series is 100% cotton, which means it's better for archival purposes than the cheaper varieties.

All of these papers are satisfactory, and some are downright

wonderful. The 300 series, pre-ruled papers are more than twice as expensive as Blue Line's standard comic book art boards, but it won't take long to verify that you'll get your money's worth. You can use any tool without much problem. The smooth paper is a bit too flat for my taste, and the regular will frustrate you at times while trying to ink with a brush, but it's certainly acceptable.

I like the 400 series a little better than the 300. The three-ply smooth surface is very nice. At \$2.34 per sheet, I guess it had better be. The 500 series is also excellent, but I just can't imagine wanting to spend close to five bucks per page. I should point out that Blue Line Pro will custom print paper in bulk. They also offer a discount to members of their Club Blue.

Kubert School Pre-Ruled Comic Pages

Surfaces available: Smooth and vellum

Thickness: Two- or three-ply

Cost: Packs of 20 pages range from \$14.95 (for two-ply) to \$23.95 (for three-ply). That's a range of \$0.75 to \$1.20 per sheet. This is pretty good paper. I'm guessing, and I hope Joe won't hunt me down if I'm wrong, that this is 300 series Strathmore. Not exceptional, but it certainly does the job. I particularly like the three-ply... a better value than the cheapest Blue Line papers, in this critic's opinion. Kubert offers a 400 series board, but when I ordered it, I was surprised to find that it was actually Blue Line paper.

Bristol Board Sheets

So, let's say you're too cheap to spring for the pre-ruled boards. To get the best paper, without paying someone else to cut it and measure the proper dimensions for you, you'll have to buy large (usually 23" x 29") sheets. You can cut these sheets into three 11" x 17" comic book pages. Then, using the shortcuts I've included elsewhere in this review, you'll be able to rule them without too much difficulty. If you buy the sheets in person at an art store, they'll probably cut them for you at no charge. Strathmore makes sheets of its 400 and 500 series bristol. I also found one alternative to Strathmore.

Strathmore Bristol Sheets

Surfaces available: Smooth and vellum

Source: I found two excellent web sites for both sheets and pads of bristol. Both www.texasart.com and www.misterart.com offer significant discounts.

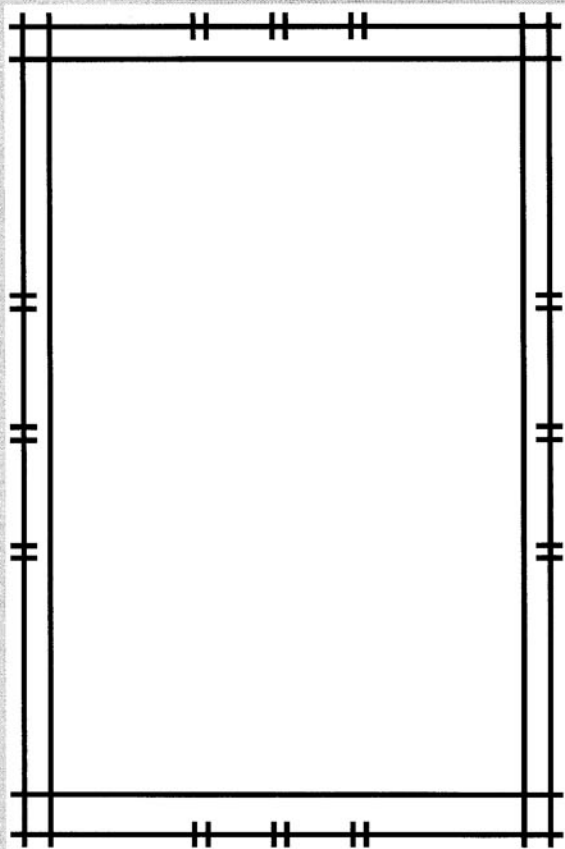
Cost: (at www.texasart.com) 400 series sheets range from \$1.35 for two-ply to \$3.03 for four-ply. Remember, you'll get three comic pages out of each of these sheets, making the total cost per page as low as \$0.45. 500 series sheets range from \$5.35 for two-ply to \$11.55 for four-ply.

Crescent Bristol Board

Surface: Vellum (this vellum surface is actually comparable to Strathmore's smooth) **Thickness:** Two-ply

Cost (at www.texasart.com): \$2.64 per sheet. Again, you'll get three pages out of one sheet.

I love this paper. The surface is smooth, but not quite as smooth as Strathmore's smooth. I thought it had just the right amount of tooth. I prefer it to Strathmore's 400 series, but it does cost a bit more.



If you plan on cutting and ruling your own boards, making templates like these can really speed up the process.

STANDARD TEMPLATE

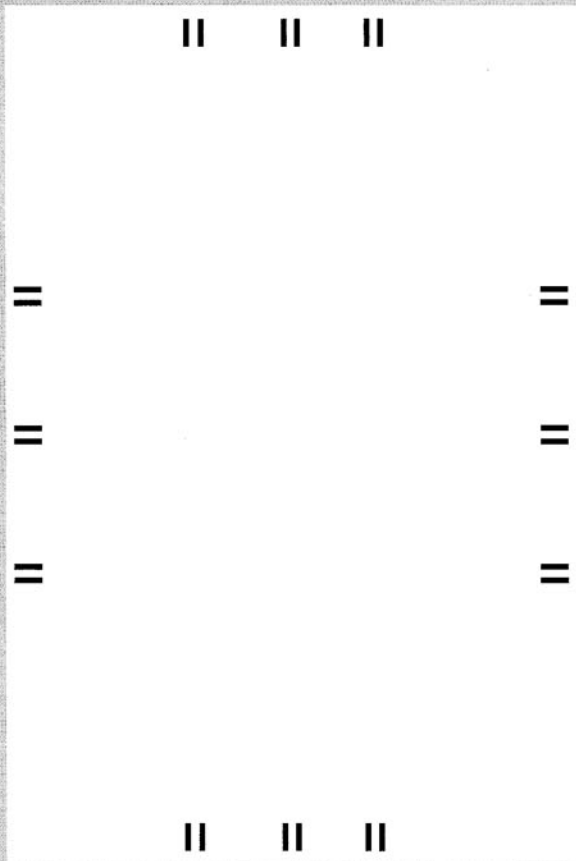
Start with a heavy piece of cardstock or 4-ply bristol. Cut your template down to 10" x 15", the standard image area for non-bleed comic pages.

Once your template is made, you'll just have to rule a line along the bottom of your 11" x 17" pieces of bristol (an inch or so from the bottom), place the template on the line, center it horizontally, and trace around the edges of your template with a non-photo blue pencil.

As you can see, I've put indicators on my templates to show me where to divide the page into some standard increments; halves and thirds. To use these indicators, just place a small line next to each one on your page of bristol. It will then be simple to connect the marks.

FULL BLEED TEMPLATE

Many comics today are being produced in full bleed format, meaning the art and color extend to the edge of the



printed page. That changes the type of guidelines you'll need. I modeled my template on DC's full bleed paper. The outer image area is 10" x 15" (if you really want to be precise, it's actually closer to 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "), so you'll cut your template to that size. In from the outer edge, you'll need another box, which indicates the area outside of which you should not risk placing any art you want to appear on the printed page. Finally, there's an inner-most box, which measures 8" x 13". You can determine that box by measuring in an inch from the edges of your template.

These measurements may vary from publisher to publisher, but the idea will be the same... you need to give yourself guidelines to be sure that no crucial art or text falls outside of the printable area.

As you can see, I again cut down a heavy piece of paper to serve as a template. I then made marks to indicate both the bleed sizes and to divide the page.

Seeing this elaborate series of lines may send you running to buy some pre-printed boards, which is fine. They are a nice and convenient product. I don't think it's too daunting, though, to make your own. You'll also be able to experiment with different paper stocks, such as the Crescent or Pro/Art bristol.

Bristol Board Pads

You'll save yourself some work, but not necessarily money, by buying bristol board in pad form. These pads were all 14" x 17", meaning you'll just have to make one cut to get to 11" x 17". Again, Strathmore dominates the market, but I did find one alternative that I like.

Strathmore Bristol Pads (available in 300 and 400 series)
Surfaces available: Smooth and vellum (300 series pad is only available in smooth)
Thickness: Two-ply

Cost: (at www.texasart.com) \$8.40 for 20 sheets of 300 series smooth. \$9.24 for 20 sheets of 400 series smooth or vellum. That equates to a range from \$0.42 to \$0.46 per page.

The pad paper is roughly equivalent to the same series in sheet form. I'm not sure the surface is identical, but any difference is negligible. Again, I like the 400 series better than the 300, and I prefer the smooth to the vellum. This is the cheapest way to get a good paper.

Pro/Art Bristol Pads
Surfaces available: Plate and vellum
Thickness: Two-ply

Cost: (at www.texasart.com) \$8.40 for pads of 12 sheets. Per page cost is \$0.70. A very good paper, maybe even better than the Strathmore 400 series pad. The surfaces are equivalent to Strathmore's... the smooth is quite nice. The higher price, though, makes it difficult for me to recommend it over the Strathmore.

Summary

So, after all of my exhaustive testing, I found that there are a lot of good papers choices out there for the comic book artist. The paper that came closest to perfect for me was the Crescent Bristol, which is only available in sheets. Any of the Strathmore boards will suffice, though. It's up to you to experiment with a few boards to see which suits you best. Then, you'll have to decide how much convenience you want to pay for. Blue Line Pro makes some excellent, ready to use papers. You'll really pay for that convenience, though.

This critic would rather spend that money on more important items... the autographed picture of Tom Jones that graces my studio, for example. I don't mind cutting and ruling my own boards. There's usually a little lull between deadlines, anyway. Make a party of it. Have the neighbors over, give everyone a sharp blade, and see what happens.

Next time, I'll review synthetic brushes. In the meantime, I'll be busy hacking up all the sheets of bristol I ordered to write this column. Until then... Draw well, and carry a finely crafted stick.

**Online Art Supply Stores Index**

I ordered from several different stores on the same day. I also placed my order in the evening, so they would be processed by each store when they opened the next day. I have made note of how many days it took for my order to arrive, what their shipping policies are, and what forms of payment they accept.

ASWexpress.com

An extensive site, which features some hard-to-find products.

Product ordered: Faber-Castell Pitt Pen Set

Order total: \$5.99 Shipping costs: \$9.95

Forms of payment accepted: Mastercard and Visa

Order arrived in 14 days.

Note: Order took two weeks to arrive via First Class Mail.

For the high minimum shipping charge, one might expect at least Priority Mail delivery.

comictones.com

They specialize in tone screens and markers, seemingly catering to the manga market.

Product ordered: Neo Piko pens

Order total: \$7.95 Shipping costs: \$5.00

Forms of payment accepted: Mastercard and Visa

Order arrived in 9 days.

Note: They included a nice T-shirt free... a bit tight on this critic, but nice, nonetheless.

danielsmith.net

A large site, with an extensive selection.

Product ordered: 3-pen set of Pigma Microns

Order total: \$7.54 Shipping costs: \$8.25

Forms of payment accepted: All major credit cards

Order arrived in 5 days.

Note: The site does not automatically calculate shipping costs.

misterart.com

Very large and well-organized site.

Products ordered: Sakura Brush Marker, set of Alvin Tech-Liners

Order total: \$10.72 Shipping costs: \$6.98

Forms of payment accepted: All major credit cards

Order arrived in 5 days.

Note: They offer a VIP membership, which costs \$25. Extra discounts available to VIP members. Worthwhile if you plan to order a lot.

scrapbooksuperstore.com

A scrapbook specialty store which carries Zigs and Pigmars.

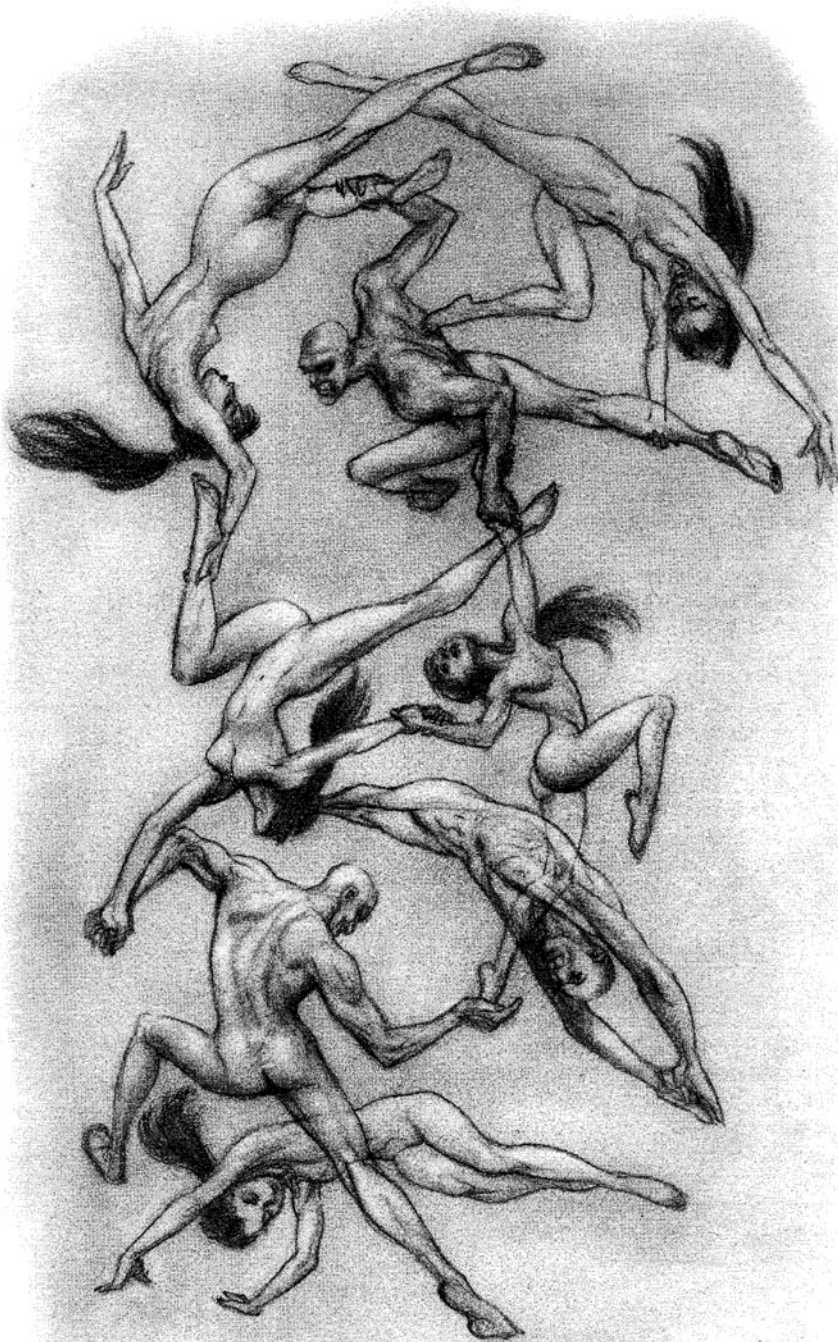
Product ordered: 5-pen set of Zig Millenniums.

Order total: \$8.99 Shipping costs: \$4.50

Forms of payment accepted: Mastercard, Visa and Discover (no American Express)

Order arrived in 6 days.

DRAWING THE FIGURE IN ACTION



The bodies writhing, twisting, leaping and flying across the following pages are dancing with gravity. This creates a sense of heaving weight in motion—the essential characteristic of convincing figure action. Without an awareness of gravity a drawn figure seems to lack mass and substance—it “floats” on the paper. Believable action conveys a sense of friction against a resisting atmosphere.

To achieve this it's best to start with an accurate conception of the body's true physical nature—as heavy, fluid flesh turning and twisting on a rigid skeletal framework. This sense of muscle sliding over bone is the crucial guiding motif of powerful images of figures in action. (In drawings or photography.) Often a figure drawing is weak and disappointing because it was conceived as a poseable arrangement of fixed anatomy, resulting in a stiff, doll-like appearance.

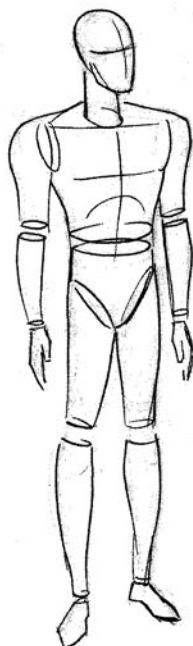
Always begin with a free and loose gesture drawing—find the largest sweep of movement running through the pose. (Animators refer to this as the “line of action.”) I find it best to work with an armature first—each artist will tailor his or her armature to their own preferences in proportion and body type, and degree of initial solidity. Below are the two general directions one can favor in designing an armature: **Example A** and **B**.

Both approaches work well, and often an artist will lean toward the one more appropriate to the task at hand. Usually the solid-sectioned armature is more suitable for sedentary or quiet poses, the “wire frame” for extreme movement.

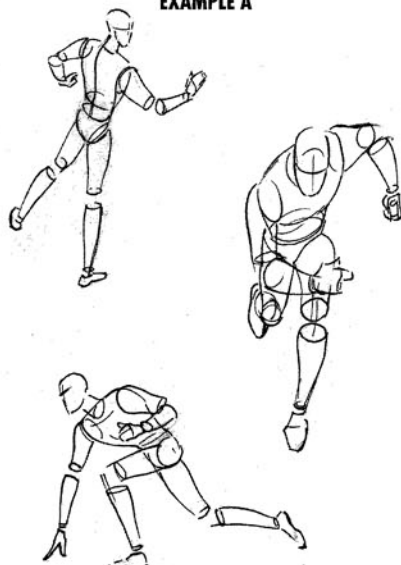
I prefer the thinner, looser armature because it encourages “pushing” the figure to its limits. I also enjoy stretching and “sculpting” the muscles and flesh over the thin framework as the drawing progresses, making discoveries about the elasticity of flesh and how far the anatomy can be convincingly manipulated. After designing an armature you feel is a comfortable sketching tool, get in the habit of beginning your searching doodles with a narrative purpose—have some idea of what the character emerging from your pencil tip is feeling or thinking. As I've stressed in previous *DRAW!* articles, a figure drawing containing no evidence of a mind or emotions is just a figure-shaped arrangement of dead lines on a surface—no more alive than a roadside STOP sign. Decide what your figure is intending by its action, and positions expressive of those intentions will occur to you as you draw. Attentive study and observation of people will broaden your vocabulary of possible poses, but everyone, by the act of being alive, has an enormous store of innate figure-action knowledge. “Reading” the body language of other people is an essential human skill, though when faced with the confusing complexity of making a figure drawing many artists lose touch with this instinctual resource and timidly construct mannequins in awkward, unnatural, puppet-like poses.

So again it's important to empathize with the character, know its intentions, feel the movements within your own body and attempt to translate the sense of wedging and twisting of fleshy mass against bone to the lines and marks you are making on the paper. Sometimes it helps to actually go through the action yourself—in front of a mirror, if possible—try to follow the movement with your “inner artist's eye” and connect it to your physical awareness of shifting, thrusting weight against the resistance of gravity.

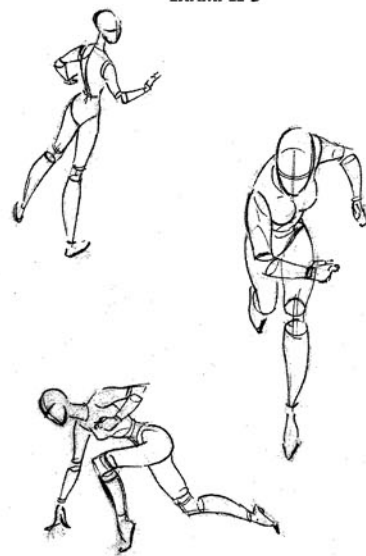
A flexible jointed figure of solid anatomical shapes—



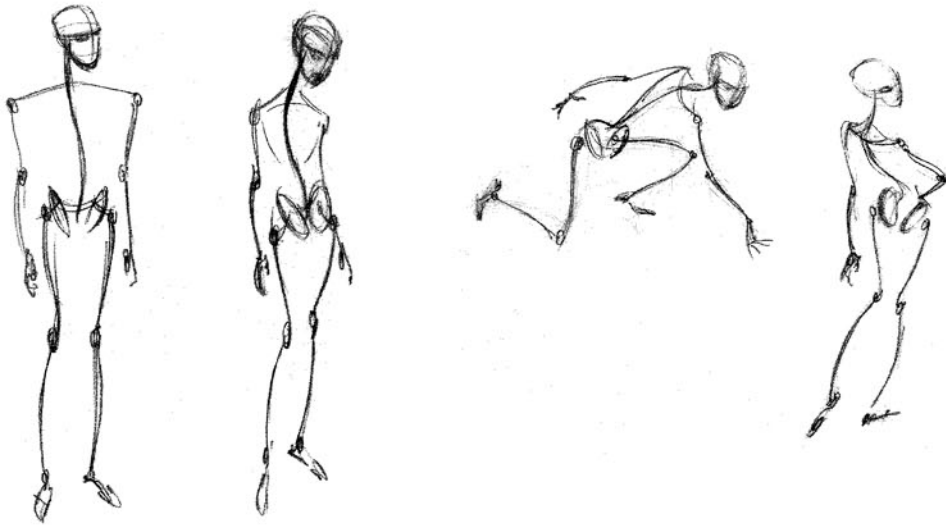
EXAMPLE A



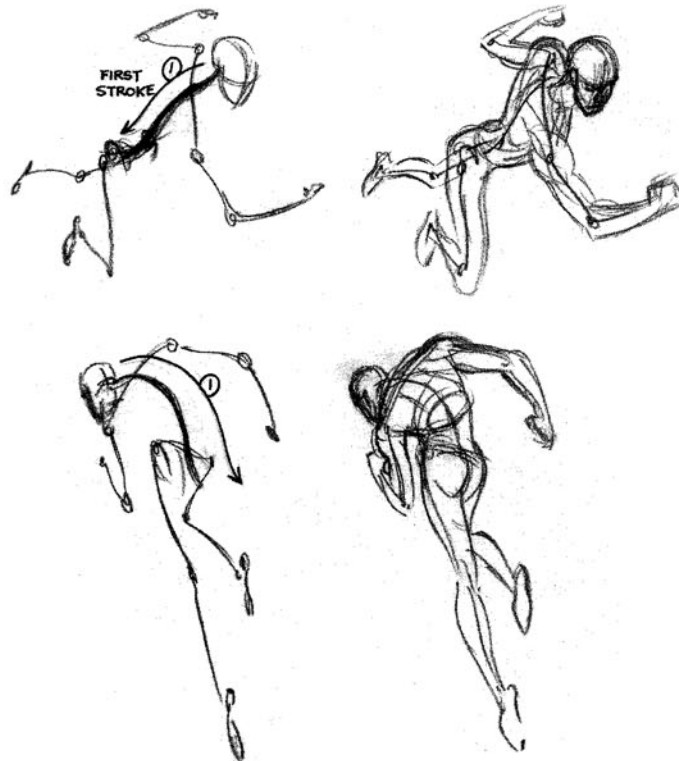
EXAMPLE B



Or a spindly “wire frame” that allows wilder initial posing.



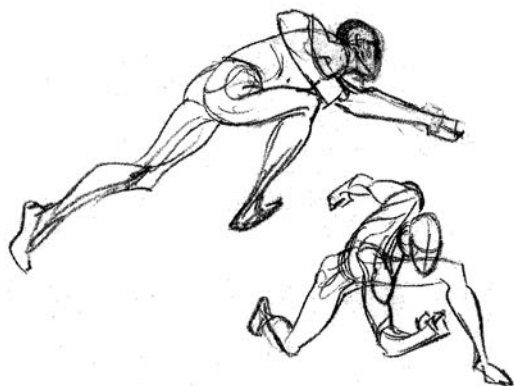
It's usually wise to start with the spine—typically the longest section of a line of action, and (except occasionally in a drawing of extreme foreshortening) invariably the center of the movement, because it is the central support of the body—the head, arms, hips and legs radiate out from it. **Example C.**





The essential action of the torso is defined by the angle and twist of the shoulders and hips in relation to the spine—as soon as you tilt the shoulder and hip lines in opposing directions the figure begins to move.

The arms and legs are out-flung supports or pillars of thrust, driving the direction of the pose. (A wonderful source of study for this dynamic interplay is video footage of gymnasts—watch sequences in slow motion and you'll learn more about shifting balance, weight and mass than is possible to observe at natural speed.)



Using your armature to establish pose and acting simplifies the more detailed and complex next step—"fleshing out" the forms into a recognizable figure. Each segment of the body is positioned, so you can devote all your attention to shaping the contours of flesh and muscle.

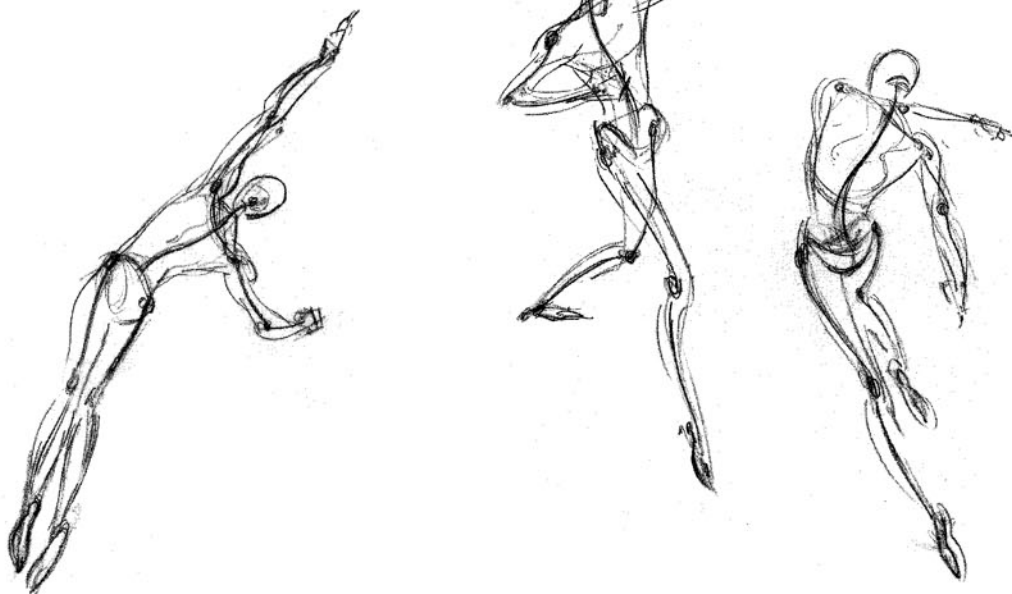


If you are drawing accurate or idealized realism, obviously knowledge of anatomy is important—a subject too deep to go into here. I learned a working knowledge of the body's physical structure from the study of anatomy books, then deepened and refined my understanding through years of observing and drawing from life. I feel compelled to stress that it's impossible to “master” anatomy—I am constantly surprised and delighted by new insight each time I draw from a model—because there is such an infinite range of proportion and individual rhythm throughout our varied species. I think it's important to mention this because I've seen so many artists develop a fixed, rigid, and (eventually) monotonous “style” of figure that becomes a formula—a standard symbol made to serve for any character—with slight or no variation. This habit leads to a dull sameness in the artist's work, and if allowed to petrify dulls his perceptions, too—a dispiriting fate for anyone. Avoid this trap—there are too many wonderful bodies in the world to settle for one arrangement of limbs and proportion.



Strive to make the figure feel “right” in its action at the armature stage—resist defining details of anatomy until your character is “alive” and communicates its intent of action as a mere skeletal frame.

These armatures have fluid, spidery lines flowing along or between the main joints of the “skeleton” to help me “feel” the action of the fleshy masses.





A typical fault that weakens figure drawings is an unnatural “stiffness” that occurs when the figure is conceived as a collection of body parts rather than a fluid, rhythmic organism of related moving parts. Avoid an awkward symmetry of limb positions (commonly referred to as “twins”)—these unfortunate directional echoes visually “lock up” a figure’s grace and fluidity. You may see this repetition of shape in nature, and will accept it in a photograph, but it is dangerous to draw such a pose—it suggests the rigidity and stiff, robotic movement of a toy “action figure.”

If you require the stolid strength of a symmetrical stance, try to find a point of view or other compositional device to introduce variety of shape and “activate” the visual rhythm of the pose.

Figure 1. This pose is static and visually stiff.

Figure 2. By shifting our point-of-view we introduce visual variety and rhythm into the same pose.

Figure 3. Another solution is to find a more dynamic posture.

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



EXAMPLE B



Always use silhouette to check the clarity of a figure's shape dynamic—any pose that can't be scanned as a solid flat pattern is unnecessarily weak—unnecessary because a bit of repositioning will invariably strengthen its visual impact.

Figure 1. This pose is poorly conceived—look at the lumpy, nebulous silhouette it forms.

Figure 2. A slight repositioning clarifies the silhouette, strengthening the drawing's impact.

EXAMPLE A



This is a crucial element of two-dimensional composition often neglected. A telegraphic silhouette is so powerful no artist should compose without understanding its magic. Learn to be aware of the flat shape described by each figure's outline—it helps to think of the drawing's contours as calligraphy. Note how easily your eye and mind apprehends each printed word you're reading—because the carefully shaped individual letters register instantly as your eye scans them, forming words and meaning in your mind. If you were to obscure the beautiful, clear contours of these same letters by blackening their open spaces, reading them would become an unpleasant chore. The same thing happens in a poorly considered drawing, so take the trouble to render each pose "clean" and easy to "read." **EXAMPLE A** and **EXAMPLE B**

Following is a gallery of various narrative artwork full of active figures—try to notice how the principles discussed over prior pages are used to achieve the desired effect in each figure. I know this can be confusing because there are many other elements working with and alongside the figures in these examples—composition, character development, pacing, story demands, and even the prosaic problem of composing around word balloons have influenced the choices behind each image—but for the moment try to isolate the figure and decide what it communicates about its physical action and how that reflects its interior emotions or thoughts.

See you next time.

Bret 

BELOW: In this two page spread from a *Sleepwalker* comic book, the hero's figure is full of over-muscled distortion, and steep "camera angles" create extreme foreshortening in some poses, but the principles of movement, balance and silhouette are used to make each image scan clearly and communicate instantly. Note how strong silhouettes strengthen the clarity of the figures and make them distinct against these hectic, complex backgrounds. In the final image Sleepwalker's figure is an actual black silhouette—drama considerations aside, a black (or "negative" white against black) silhouette is an invaluable device for making small figures read well within a busy composition.



USE FOR PASTE-UP ONLY

USE FOR PASTE-UP ONLY

SLEEPWALKER CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.



MARY MARVEL AND SUPERGIRL TM & © 2006 DC COMICS

TOP LEFT: A page from a scenario common in super-hero comic books—two heroes (heroines in this case) slugging it out over some confusion of purpose or misunderstanding between them. (Calm discussion of conflicting opinions doesn't offer many opportunities for wild figure action.) The posing here reflects the story requirements—neither character is vicious or enraged, just angry and confused—the motivating emotion of the action is frustration, not conquest. (In the exaggerated visual language of the super-hero genre, I should note—if these characters were non-super the same drawings would represent extreme violence.)

LOWER LEFT: This image involves bold foreshortening and perspective along the giant's left arm—special care was required in silhouetting the small figures in his grasp because two of them are severely cropped by his closed fingers—you must pay especially close attention to pose and clarity when only part of the figure is visible—the viewer must find it effortless to imagine the hidden parts “fitting” in their proper space.

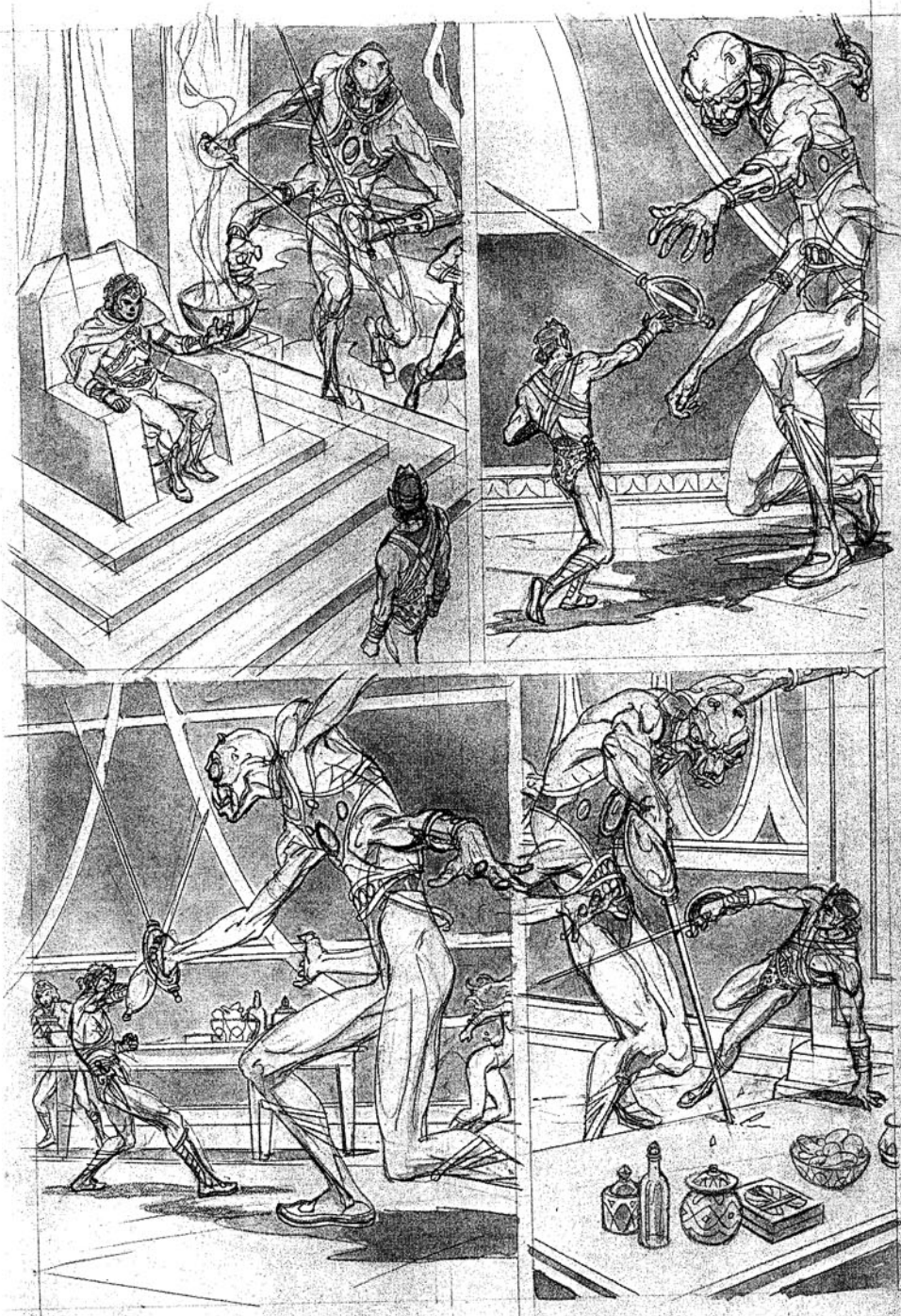
BELOW: This image is a carefully structured thrust-and-recoil pairing of related shapes—the sword wielding Illyana is full of violent intent—her adversary is trying to stop her, not hurt her—the silhouetted poses explain this instantly.



CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.



THE NEW MUTANTS TM & © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.



LEFT: This page is enlivened by the sort of special challenges that often add fascination to illustrating fantasy—in this case creating convincing action for an attenuated four-armed Martian dueling with a human less than half his size. Although the problem of silhouetting the Martian's figure is obviously complicated by the extra limbs, it also offers welcome opportunities for variety. I had a wonderful time with this sequence—the Edgar Rice Burroughs material has an antiquated charm that suggests an elegant, graceful treatment of figure action that might seem dainty by modern standards. (Regrettably!)



LEFT: This excerpt from a longer sequence is about the graceful exercise of force and power. I approached this rooftop battle as a choreographed dance—Batman has just returned to duty after a debilitating injury and the drama theme here is the affirmation of his mastery and precision of skill, rhythm and strength. Each pose is designed to convey his flexibility and command.



LEFT: The intensity of this complicated sequence of action is increased by the crossing arcs of movement thrusting through the entire page—the silhouette of each figure had to express an interior attitude and simultaneously fulfill its task as part of the design that charges the page with hectic rhythm. The last image reveals the value of superimposed silhouette—the tight cropping and close camera angle prevent the possibility of silhouetting the entire figure, so the overlapping foreground element (her hand) has been carefully designed with a strong silhouette—if the hand were blackened its gesture would read clearly.



LEFT: This page is a fast sequence of fierce conflict—the extreme, almost reckless force of Illyana's poses shout her rage as she attacks the size-shifting demon with relentless fury. She's unstoppable and the demon's poses clearly reveal he's outmatched and defensive.



THE NEW MUTANTS TM & © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

ABOVE: Here silhouetting makes each individual figure action clear, and also forms two larger group silhouettes that work together to build the composition. Careful arrangement of the heroes as a unit create an exploding shape that seems to burst from the circular portal against the opposing arc of thorny demon shapes surging in to oppose them. At the one point where the two shape groups overlap (Illyana's right ankle), strong silhouettes of Illyana's leg and the demon's hand insure the clarity of both forms as the overlay separates the two masses in space, creating depth and tension.

For more of Bret's artwork, visit his website: www.bretblevins.com

THE SAVAGE PENCIL OF ERIK LARSEN



One the cusp of the 10th anniversary of *The Savage Dragon*, (issue #100, approaching Jack Kirby's historic numbers on the '60s *Fantastic Four*) *Draw! Magazine* Editor Mike Manley catches up with Erik Larsen. The only Image creator still drawing his title since the first issue (without a fill-in), Larsen gives forth on technique, drive, commitment and Jack Kirby in this funny and frank interview with one of the most dynamic creators working in comics today.

DRAW!: I'd like to start off and ask how you go about approaching your work. Since you both write and ink the *Savage Dragon*, how do you start? Do you work up roughs or layouts from your script or plot and then transfer the art to the final board?

ERIK LARSEN: At this point I'm going right to the boards and start drawing but I tend to reinvent the wheel every so often. There was a long period where I was drawing out the comics on 8½" x 11" paper folded in half and blowing them up. I've done thumbnails at various other sizes as well. But I get bored if I keep doing things the same way over and over. I'll do something

for a while and switch. I'll talk to somebody and they'll tell me how they work and then I'll try it out to see how it works for me. These days I'm going right to the boards. It keeps changing.

One of the things I like about going directly to the boards is the mistakes that result. If you plan things out too much in advance, if you figure everything out and adjust things there aren't those wonderful "happy accidents" that you get when you just dive right into it. Your work can get very stiff and restrained when you're doing too much preliminary drawing, I find.

DRAW!: When you said you were blowing them up, what were you doing? Were you blowing them up and then tracing them on an art-o-graph, or tracing them on a light box?

EL: A light box. I've got a photocopy machine in the room with me at all times. [chuckles] So it makes life easier. And I've got a light box so I can do such things as go over and blow it up

exactly. I can do things where I'm doing sketches in my sketchbook. "Oh, that turned out really cool. I should use that as a cover." And then blow that up.

DRAW!: Do you keep a sketchbook?

EL: Yeah, but it's really out of date. I started right after our house had burned down. At that point I had all these comics that I had done as a kid, and after our house burned down, I didn't have any of them anymore. So I thought, "I've got to put down on paper all of the characters I can remember now."

DRAW!: Oh, wow.

EL: [laughter] I was basically, "How did that cape go?" Stuff like that. So I tried to get it down. Once the whole Image thing started up, it was kind of important for me to keep the sketchbook so I could figure things out before I started my book. At this point, I've been doing it on and off, and I'm confident enough in the work that I do that I'll just design something on the page for the most part. There's not much in the way of preliminary stuff at all.

DRAW!: So you don't tend to work up little model sheets of the characters at all?

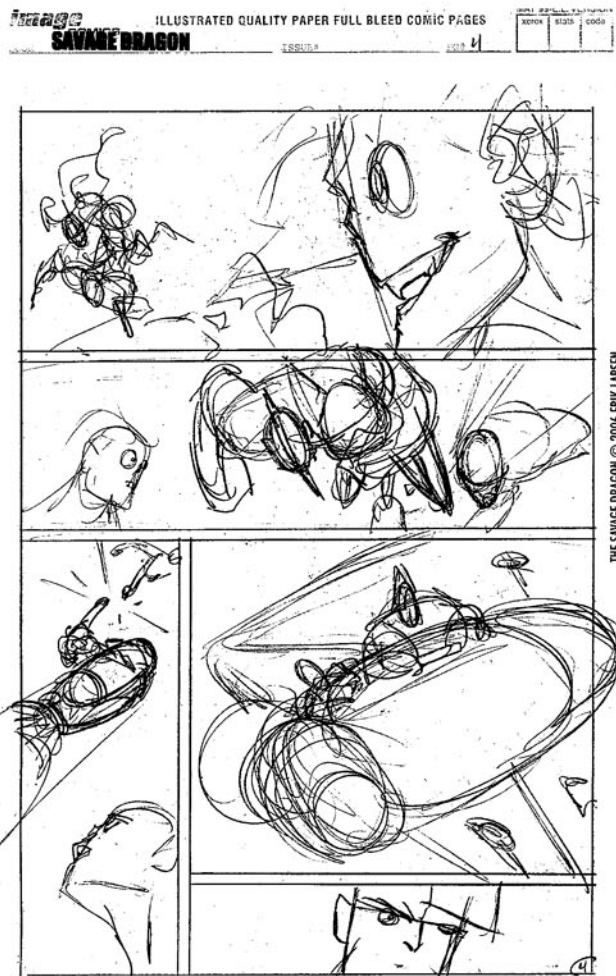
EL: No, never. Never. The best model sheet I ever get would be like, "Here is a front view." But I never would go, "Here he is from the front, here he is from the side, here he is from the back." Not at all. I just sort of... pray that they work. [laughter]

DRAW!: Then you turn them around and go, "Oh, wait, that looks weird!"

EL: Yup. And sometimes you design things and you go, "Really, this stinks. This character with spikes on the inside of his legs is going to have to walk." You know? "Oh! What do you know?" I have a character named the Kid Avenger who has spikes right on the insides of his legs pointing toward each other. And whenever his legs are apart, you can see that, and whenever his legs are together, somehow or other they work fine.

DRAW!: I see, nano-technology or something. *The magic of comics.*

EL: Yeah! They either shrink into his leg or... they're just never drawn that way. Nobody's ever written in and said, "Wait a minute! This doesn't work at all!" I actually think maintaining some of that magic is important. Comics are drifting to a point where we can no longer buy that Clark Kent could hide a big red "S" under a thin white shirt and the drive to make these books believable takes away from the fun of them, I think. The Hulk was exposed to Gamma Rays during a bomb test—that's GREAT! I mean, I watch the *Powerpuff Girls* and I'm right there, you know? Sugar, spice, everything nice plus Chemical-X equals little girls with superpowers! That works for me! This burning desire to give Spider-Man an updated origin and make



all of these things "work" takes away from the fun. Super-hero comics are supposed to be fun. Having radiation give you hair loss and diarrhea may be more realistic but it's not that entertaining—unless it's Dung, of course! If you give the runs to a villain it's a hoot and a half!

DRAW!: That's one of the things I've always enjoyed about your work, too, is that there's obviously a sense humor at work.

EL: [laughter] There *has* to be.

DRAW!: Now that you've been doing the *Savage Dragon* for a long time, 10 years, you're up to issue 102, 103?

EL: I've done 102, 103 issues, something like that. I'm actually working as we speak on issue 99, but there were about five issues of material that predated starting up the series at Image, so there's been more work done than that. At this point I've done, I dunno, 2200 pages of the *Dragon*, or more. And I don't sell any of it, either, so I've got ungodly piles of the stuff. [laughter]



LARSEN: (Left) Typical underdrawing for a *Dragon* page. I ink this directly. Sometimes I'll tighten up faces or hands a bit (if needed) but most of the time I just jump right in there (above) and start slapping down ink.

DRAW!: That's great, though. A lot of creators don't get to have a complete run of their work from the beginning to the end on a character. Most artists get back only a percentage of their work from the books they do. The artists from the old days, the Golden Age or the Silver Age, they didn't get back *anything*, or rarely. It often got cut-up. The exceptions might be if you were a strip artist, then you usually got to keep some of it. Although even a lot of those artists didn't keep the originals because they never thought they would be worth anything.

EL: Yeah, it doesn't or didn't have any value.

DRAW!: Now some of that art goes for a hundreds, thousands of dollars. It's amazing. Now, when you were working for

Marvel on *Spider-Man*, etc., and you left, formed Image and started working on the *Dragon*, did you change your process at all, since now you were in charge of writing the stories and pacing and everything?

EL: It's much more half-assed, if that's what you mean. [laughter]

DRAW!: So you are less formal? Would you plot the whole issue out, or would you sort of leave things loose to kind of figure out as you went along?

EL: I plot to generally page by page. And it's generally the numbers 1-22, and it has all of points I want to hit. If there's some important dialogue, I'll put it in there just to remind me of it. And then I'll go to draw it and change every damned thing. [laughter] If dialogue occurs to me while I'm drawing I'll scribble it on the page to remind me when I'm scripting.

DRAW!: So when you start drawing on the boards, you work directly, breaking down the story page by page from the plot? Do you draw in non-photo blue or in HB pencil? Is this how you work?

EL: Yeah, HB. All these school pencils with erasers on the ends.

DRAW!: Oh really?

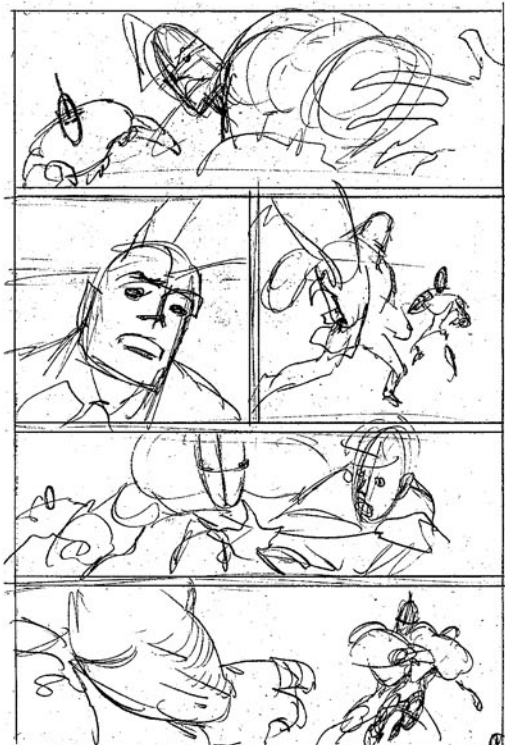
EL: Yeah.

DRAW!: So you've got a big pencil sharpener there? No lead holder, or mechanical pencils?

EL: [chuckles] It's great! I was using a harder lead earlier on and I just got tired of it. I was tired of it digging into the paper and having to erase it and not being able to erase it real easily and all that stuff. So I just thought, "screw that." Just let me go with this squishy thing here. Just drawing it with lip-stick. [laughter] You can really fly with a soft pencil.

DRAW!: So you go straight through... you pencil the entire issue?

EL: Generally, I try to. But the last few months, I've been getting about halfway through and then sending off those pages and then scripting them and then doing the second half, another batch. But generally I like to sit down, pencil the whole bloody thing, send it off... and generally what I would do is lay out the whole issue in one or two days. Very rough circle-for-a-head type stuff. And then I would send it off, script it that night, script like half the book. Stay up until, like, three in the morning scripting it, doing balloon placement. Then Chris Eliopoulos would get the pencil boards on that next day. He would letter however many pages he could do that day, then send them back. So during the day that he's lettering that first bunch, I'm scripting the rest of it. The next day I'm done scripting and I get the pages



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.

LARSEN: Occasionally problems will crop up. In this case I talked so much in panel two that Dragon's face was pretty much squeezed between the two balloons on the lettered page. Rather than rewrite it, I redrew the panel and worked with the dead space to compose a new panel. I often will ink it with a brush first then a pen. Once outlines are done I'll erase and do the final detail afterwards.

back from the first half.

DRAW!: Is he lettering on the boards or is he doing it digital?

EL: On the boards.

DRAW!: So you like to have the lettering incorporated as a piece of the artwork?

EL: I just want to know how much space it's taking up, and I want to be able to accommodate it. If it turns out that I talked more than I should have, I'll come in and shrink that head.

DRAW!: So when the boards come back, they're all lettered, but it's still pretty roughly penciled at that time?

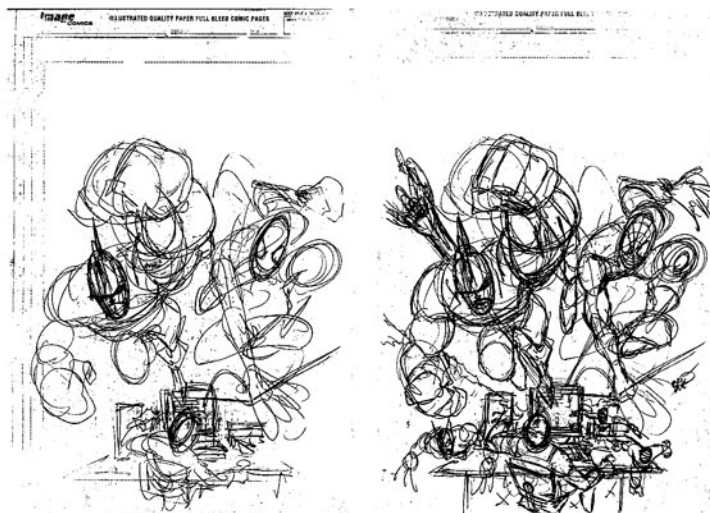
EL: Oh yeah.



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.



ART TOOLS:

I pencil with a Dixon Ticonderoga 1388-2/HB—it's a mushy pencil with the eraser on the end. I used to use a harder lead but it dug into the paper too much and it was a bitch to erase. The HB pencil can fly! I ink with a Hunt 102 and a Winsor & Newton Series 7, No. 2 brush. I use Higgins Design waterproof drawing ink. For straight lines I mostly use markers—either a Pentel Rolling Writer or a Sanford Micro Uni-Ball. Neither pen ink deteriorates over time. This was a cover for *Write Now #2*—another fine publication from TwoMorrrows.



SPIDER-MAN, WOLVERINE, THE HULK, THING, NOVA © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.
THE SAVAGE DRAGON TM AND © 2006 ERIK LARSEN

DRAW!: So then you go in and you pencil it, or tighten them up at that point?

EL: No, I start inking. [laughter] It really depends upon what it is. If it's a specific face, okay, this is a girl face, and she'd better not look like Darkseid when you're done with it. Then I'll come in and make sure her eyes are on the same level and her face isn't completely whacked out of shape. Then I'll go in and ink it. Even so, those features could be completely simple, like big round circles for eyeballs, a basic line for where her nose is, a basic line for where her mouth is. I'm not real specific about it. I also try my best to have whatever expressions are on people's faces completely match what they're talking about.

DRAW!: Yes, that's something you really have the luxury of, since you're both writing and drawing the book. The lettering's there, so you can really match the expressions to it. Where, often, if you're working from a plot, you have nothing to match it to specifically. You have something in *your* head, draw it that way, even put down border notes and maybe the writer gets it and he writes something different. You've got someone yelling, and the writer draws him speaking softly or not at all.

EL: I'm a writer who has written for other people. I've always been the kind of guy who, when they get the art, and see the guy is yelling, I'll go, "Okay, well, I have to write him yelling even though I didn't intend him to be yelling. Now that he *is* yelling, I've gotta come up with something for him to be yelling." Because that drives me nuts when they're not matching the dialogue and art. And I'd be real accommodating of whatever, just coming up with some way of reconciling whatever problems there would be. Miscommunication stuff like that does happens. If the artist drew it that way, that's what I've got to live with, I've got to come up with a way of making that work. That's really part of the job, I think. I mean, if I were writing a full-script and it didn't mesh I'd have a cause to complain but I write a plot and



LARSEN: There's actually more to this than you see here. I drew a few versions that I discarded and once I inked the main figure here I went back and roughly penciled in the heads. I knew there would be a logo on this but I drew in the sea of heads anyway—even though I knew readers wouldn't get to see them!

RIGHT: The finished cover.

when you write a plot it's your job to make things work with whatever it is that you get back from the artist.

DRAW!: At this point, you have the pages back, they're all lettered, pencils ready, tightened up if need be—you're going to start inking. How do you approach that? Are you a pen and a brush man? What are your tools?

EL: It's all pen and brush. Generally, I use all the pens you're not supposed to when I'm doing straight lines, so I use a Pentel Rolling Writer or a Micron Uniball or something like that for straight lines. And then it's whatever I happen to have in my hand. Hunt 102 is the nib of choice, but if I happen to be sitting there with a brush in my hand, I'll use that if I can pull it off. And sometimes I do, and sometimes I look at it and just go, "Arghh, that looks awful!" Then the whiteout comes into play.

DRAW!: So you don't go through pen first, outlining, or doing contours, then go through with the brush?

EL: Absolutely not. I'm completely spontaneous and a page that

I ink on Tuesday could look completely different if I would have happened to ink it on Wednesday.

DRAW!: A very spontaneous approach. Do you do this because you find that that's just naturally the way you work, or because it keeps it fresh for you?

EL: All of the above, really. And a lot of times it's just when people are coming up to pick up the pages, too. [laughter] Because the colorists that I work with are in the Bay area, and if they need pages... "Okay, we're coming over." I may need to finish fast, "Okay, I guess that background's a silhouette." [laughter] Luckily I've not sent out too many pages where I was thinking they would suck. That's the worst, when you're sending out something and you go, "Well, there's nothing I could do, it just sucks." [laughter]

DRAW!: Yeah, the Fed Ex guy is standing there looking at you going, "hurry up pal..."

EL: There gets to be a certain point here, where I have to wrap it up.

DRAW!: Well, since you are working for yourself you can say, "Well, I'll hold this page back" or "I can change it later." You have the final say. Often you don't have that opportunity work-





LARSEN: Here's a *Thor* page that Klaus Janson inked. I was supposed to do breakdowns on this job but I'd never done breakdowns before and these tended to look more like full pencils. Working with Klaus on *Thor* (and the *Defenders*) was a real treat. I love what he brings to the page. Klaus kicks ass!

ing for other companies. You have to say, "Well, these two pages have to be out by five today, and maybe it's not as good as I could make it, but it's as good as I could make it in the three hours I have left" or something.

EL: Yeah, but I do that anyway. [laughter] Because I know that at the end of the month, I've got to have 22 pages penciled and inked, and at some point you've got to draw the line. If I spend a

day working on this page, that's taking a day away from the *next* one, at some point you just have to let it go.

DRAW!: So you try to have a rhythm, a schedule with your work hours?

EL: I do try to make it a thing where I'm just going, "Okay, I've gotta have two pages a day inked," or whatever. And then there gets to be crunch periods, too, where I'm sitting there going, "Well, I guess today I've got to do *six*. What the heck?"

DRAW!: Do you find that you enjoy that, the discipline, that pressure of having a monthly deadline?

EL: Absolutely. Because what happens is if I *don't* the goof-off periods expand. So I really need to have it be fairly tight or I'll still do the work in the same amount of time, but instead I'll spend the day on the internet, or I'll spend the day going off and buying CDs, or finding out some other way of completely wasting time.

DRAW!: Do you keep a pretty normal nine to five schedule?

EL: Pretty much nine to five. Well *exactly* nine to five.

DRAW!: Do you do that so you can interface with the rest of the business world, editors, and people like that?

EL: No, I don't have any of that. I've just got a wife and kids, and they come home. So I can't really be sitting here going, "I got 84 pages to do, honey, I'm sorry." I just don't want to be rude, y'know? I love my family.

DRAW!: Well, certainly the family is a big priority.

EL: The thing is, you will accommodate whatever it is that you've got going on in your life. They say the work expands to fill the time you have to do it in, and that's very much the case. You will also find that you *can* do the work in any particular amount of time, unless it's completely ridiculous. But most professional artists who've got it even remotely figured out could do a monthly comic book easily. But they just don't. Ah well.

DRAW!: Interesting. So you feel that many artists could do at least one monthly book?

EL: Oh yeah! I look at people's work and I go, "It's inconceivable to me that since you can draw well enough... why wouldn't you be able to do that?" The only thing tripping you up is that you're sitting there going, "But I'm not satisfied with it. I'm not happy with the way it looks." But your audience doesn't necessarily feel the same way that you do. When it comes down to it,



body else is that those guys just let it go. "This is my job, I need to get this amount of work done every day, so I get this amount of work done, and then I send it away."

DRAW! You don't think it has anything to do with their particular personality, or skill level? Many artists just can't draw that fast or feel they can't.

EL: Well, yes, but they're goof-offs, is the thing. They don't *want* to do the work. Shooting foam arrows at other guys in the studio takes priority, you know? And people get something of a bind, too, where they're going, "I'm not happy with it. I can't let it go. I can't let work go that I'm not 100% happy with." That tends to slow folks up, the whole "I only do two books a year so they'd better be amazing or people will be really disappointed with me." My God, man! Get off your ass! Art Adams—knock it off! I don't *need* to see every hair on everybody's head and every black filled in with cross-hatching, not when, by doing that, you only draw three comics a year instead of 12! I love those wonky distorted faces that Kirby used to draw when he was pounding out the pages! I'd love it if Art and Adam (Hughes) and all the other slugs in this industry would wake up tomorrow and say, "Screw that—I'm going to pound out two pages a day come hell or high water." And get some comics going. If all these brilliant artists would just quite being so bloody anal and get off their fat cans we could really have one heck of an industry!

DRAW! That's something that seems to in greater and greater proportion plague the generations that came after the "greatest generation" of cartoonists. The Silver and Golden Age artists like Kirby, Kane, Kubert etc. It seems like the other artists you mentioned—Kirby, Buscema—they were also

family men, and they also liked to hang out with their families and kids, they were also supporting their wives, putting their kids through college. Comics was a job, just like the butcher or milkman, (admittedly cooler) yet they made the deadlines and did amazing amounts of work and great work to boot.

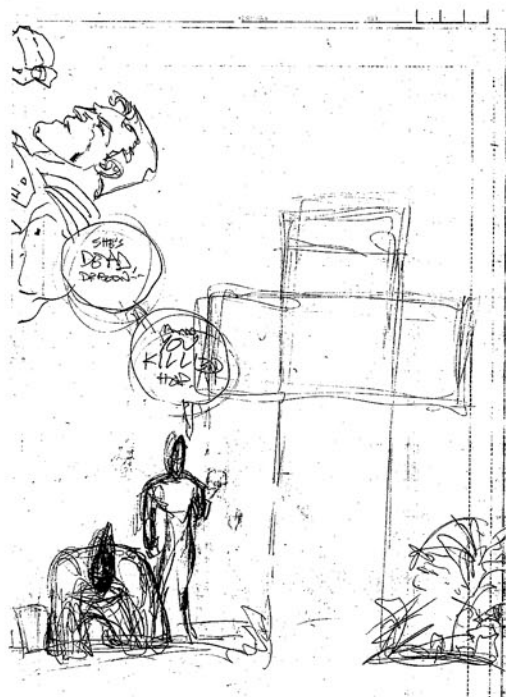
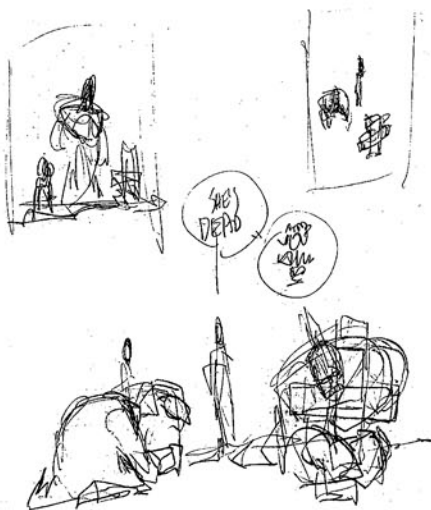
EL: Yeah. People poo-poo guys for grabbing the cash. But that's what those old guys did, in a way. They weren't creating "art" in their minds—they were pounding out as much work as possible, quality be damned. It just happened to be that these guys were incredible talents. The thing is, they couched it in different terms. They were trying to "support their family." Well, who's

ABOVE: The final inked page by Klaus Janson.

I'd rather see a story that Adam Hughes isn't 100% happy with than nothing, which is the alternative. Adam draws like an SOB. Also, if you see him doing sketches at conventions, he's also fast! Why isn't this guy doing a monthly comic? It saddens me that he's going to die and we're going to go, "Oh, look, here's his body of work." And it's like, "damn it!" [laughter] It just pisses me off that there's these guys out there whose work I look at and go, "Man, it's so good." I want more of it. And the big difference between Jack Kirby and John Buscema and every-

THE ANATOMY OF A COVER

THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.

going to argue with trying to support your family, for crying out loud? I mean, how noble is that? You're working your ass off to support your family. Well, of course! Sure! You *ought* to do that!

DRAW!: And at a substantially lower page rate than we get today, too.

EL: Hell, yeah! Unfortunately we're in a place now where artists



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.

LARSEN: Sometimes I'll go through a mess of layouts before I hit on the one I ultimately go with. In this case, the final cover was completed rather quickly—but getting a layout that I was happy with took forever! I wanted to get a Joe Kubert-vibe with the oversized lettering. Chris Eliopoulos did the lettering on the final cover. This was just to give him an idea. My signature was statted to neg on the printed cover.

don't have to work so hard because the page rates are so damned good! In the old days you'd have to bust your buns to get enough scratch to put food on the table. These days you can draw a cover a month and sell the art on eBay and make more money than an old-timer would on an entire book—even adjusted for inflation! Those old guys were getting paid what I get paid on *Savage Dragon*, for crying out loud. [laughter] It's fun doing this stuff for yourself.

DRAW!: Vanity press, right?

EL: Absolutely. I love it. [laughter] I'd actually be really raking it in if I sold my pages. I've had a lot of offers—big money, too,



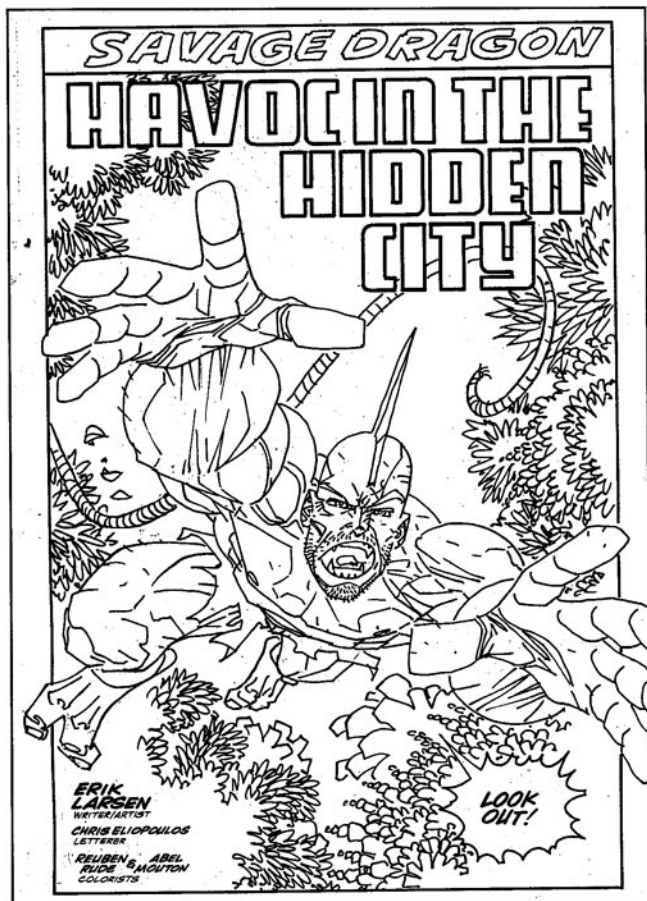
LARSEN: In some cases, I'll go in a completely different direction in the inks that I'd intended in the pencils. In this case, I opted to go with an open Euro-style. I like to experiment from time to time doing different techniques.

but it's tough to let go of it. These are characters I created from the ground up. I'm comfortable selling off *Spider-Man* pages and whatnot but it's not the same with *Savage Dragon*. I actually sold a *Vanguard* page years ago and I just didn't like the way it felt. It was like selling a piece of myself. I felt dirty. The other books are different. I don't have the emotional attachment to *Spider-Man* that I do to *Savage Dragon*.

There was a point where a collector said to me that it was too bad that I held on to it all. That there were thousands of fans who would never get to own a page of *Savage Dragon* art because I was hoarding it all and that made me stop and think. I don't like the idea of that, actually. In those terms I could see it. At one point a collector offered to trade a complete Kirby *Thor* for an issue of *Savage Dragon* straight up. I had to think long and hard about that one. I ended up doing a couple massive commissioned pieces instead. I didn't like seeing those go but at least I didn't form a real attachment to the pieces because I knew in the back of my head that these were for somebody else. They were pretty cool pieces. The biggest, most involved drawings I've done.

INKING AND COLLABORATION

DRAW!: When you're working on a company book or crossover,



like you just did the *Savage Dragon/Superman* book, you penciled that but didn't ink it, that was being inked by Al Gordon. Did you have to pencil that a bit tighter?

EL: Yeah, he would completely freak out if he saw the pencils I do for myself. "I don't know what to do with this. What are we looking at? Is this a guy or a sack of garbage?" [laughter]

DRAW!: And the same when you were working with Klaus Janson on the *Defenders*? Did you also pencil tighter when you were doing the *Defenders*?

EL: That was breakdowns, but it was still tighter than the *Dragon*.

DRAW!: How much tighter? I know it can be a sliding scale, for some breakdowns just means not spotting or filling in the blacks.

EL: I'd never done breakdowns before. I had them send me some photocopies of breakdowns so I had a general idea of what to shoot for. They send me some John Byrne *Spider-Man* pages where he was just scribbling away. No webs on the outfit or anything. What I did was closer to full pencils but I felt as though it was okay to draw crappy cars and omit some details. Hands were a bit looser, backgrounds were a bit looser but I still spot-



LARSEN: This time out I went pretty nuts. The Dragon figure ended up getting reworked into a more powerful pose and the rest was pretty freeform. I splattered ink with a toothbrush—I dragged an X-acto blade over radiating lines to get that broken effect and had myself a ball.



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.



LARSEN: After doing a few sketches that fell short I finally came up with this one for the *Savage Dragon*: *This Savage World* collection. These issues being collected were an homage of sorts to Jack Kirby and I decided to do a Kirbyesque cover in terms of layout. Often Jack would do covers that would hit on multiple aspects of a story and I decided to do the same...



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.

ted all the blacks and indicated light sources and whatnot.

DRAW!: Tighter than what you do for yourself.

EL: What I do for myself is cave art. [laughter]

DRAW!: So do you enjoy occasionally doing a tighter story where you pencil a little bit more if you're being inked by somebody else?

EL: No, not really. I kind of feel like I should have a pen in my hand, and why am I wasting my time doing this, because it's just going to be inked by somebody else. The only thing that is kind of really fun about it is just seeing what somebody else brings to the table. That's what I like about it with another inker.

DRAW!: So you enjoy collaborating with inkers like Janson who bring something different than yourself to the table, but you would really just prefer to be able to always pencil and ink your own work?

EL: Yeah! Because there's always this stupid stuff in all the drawing that you do. There's always somebody who's just got arm hair. And you just go, "Why am I penciling 900 arm hairs? I could have a pen in my hand." There's no reason at all that it would be any slower for me to have a pen in my hand than it would be for me to have a pencil in my hand. I'm sitting here doing this stupid thing that somebody else is going to be going, "Wow, man, I've gotta ink all these arm hairs?" It's like, "I could have given this to you already done, these arm hairs, but then you wouldn't be able to see the arm muscles through all this black ink." So I have to pencil it. But there's still something really cool about giving it to somebody else and seeing what they bring out of it.

DRAW!: Well, that's true, it can be exciting. On another note, as much as everybody talks about the coming wave of digital inking, and all that newer technology today, there's something that you can only get if you give an inker, like Janson, Terry Austin or somebody who really puts a bit of their own personality into it. You can't get any other way.

EL: Yeah! Where are those guys? The inkers with real personali-



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN

LARSEN: At this stage all of the outlines were done—time to erase.

ties, I find, are really a dying breed. We don't have Frank Giacoia or a Joe Sinnott, Vinnie Colletta and all these guys where you just look at these guys and go, "I know who inked that panel!" Some of those "Many Hands" jobs, you'd go, "I know who inked every one of these pages. The Klaus Janson page is sitting there next to the Joe Rubinstein page next to the Terry Austin page next to the Bob McLeod page, and they don't look *anything* alike." They didn't try to make a smooth transition at all! It doesn't blend one bit. And it's completely obvious where one inker stops and the next picks up. Now, I think, you'd have a much tougher time picking out and distinguishing a lot of these guys. I think, more and more, the inkers that we're getting are all trying to be slick. They're all trying to put down that slick Scott Williams line. These days if it's a Many Hands job, it's just a bunch of those guys who've all got that cool, slick line. And I don't think that it's a bad line at all that they're putting down, but I can't look at it and go, "This guy is so much worlds apart from this other guy." It all kind of has a certain sameness to it.

DRAW!: Well... I agree with you, but I also think that's because pencilers today all tend to draw really super-tight, almost like the pencils are inked, and the older guys drew tight enough and let the inker finish the art.

EL: Yup! Yup, yup, yup. That's another thing. That's not how it used to be. We were called collaborators, you know? And that means that one guy would give somebody something else, and they'd have someplace to move with it and to do something with it.

DRAW!: True.

EL: But I know that feeling. When I was starting out, I was just like, "I want my line to be seen. I want to have my contribution to this book be apparent." And nowadays, when I'm sitting there doing stuff for Marvel or DC, what I really want to get out of it is that collaboration, because otherwise I'd just ink it myself. I don't look for inkers that are just going to trace my work. That's the exact opposite. I'm looking for inkers who are going to come in there and go, "Yeah, right. You think you know what you're doing. Well, let me show you." [laughter] Just go and do something else entirely! I dug having Klaus Janson ink my stuff. I really enjoyed having John Beatty ink my stuff over on *Spider-Man*. This guy's bringing something that I couldn't even... it's inconceivable to me that I could even come up with this stuff. And then I get the pages and I look at it going, "Oh, I should start incorporating some of the stuff John Beatty manages to find in my pencils, in my own way."

DRAW!: So you find it a learning process, yourself.

EL: Yeah! I want to get something out of this deal! [laughter]

DRAW!: Now, going back to inking a little bit. You said you were using different types of markers and various bits, sort of a real mixed media.

EL: Doing straight lines, though. Really, most of my inking... I would say 80% what I do in ink is pen. There are occasionally periods where I'll get into this real "brush" kick and just be, like, "I've got to use a brush on stuff!" But it's pretty damn chunky when I do, so when I see it print I'll rethink how I want to do things at that point. Well, next issue it's going to be all pen because I've got to make up for that last one that looks like I was inking it with a toothbrush.

DRAW!: I take it, then, that you find that your inking process is always changing, you're always learning something as you go along?

EL: I'm always trying different things. There will be periods where I'm putting Zip-a-tone in everything. And then there will be times when I'm putting Zip-a-tone on nothing. I'll splatter

SAVAGE DRAGON

THIS SAVAGE WORLD

COVER



LARSEN: The saucers are a cheat—I've drawn them once from this angle and I keep pasting them up and adding different shiny effects on them. At this point I go in and add all the details—body hair, cracks in the rocks and the rest. That crackling energy (often called Kirby dots) was done with a B-3 lettering nib which gives a circular shape.

THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN.

BLUE BORDERS PRINTED BY BLUE LINE ARTS

ink with a toothbrush at times or use a sponge or drag a razor across the page or scribble with a white-out pen. I try out a lot of effects. I'll make my own zip by firing drafting and design applique film through my photocopy machine. I'll do an effect on a separate sheet, feed it through the machine and cut and peel. I'll go through periods of looking through a variety of different people's comics trying to figure out, "How in the world did *he* do it?" But I'm not the kind who actually sits there with books out when working. That's going too far, to me.

DRAW!: You mean books out on your table when you're working?

EL: Yeah. People who are sitting there going, "Well, if I don't have my drawing board littered with comics I'm being inspired by." I know guys like that. They just have to have stuff out.

DRAW!: And if they don't have stuff, they—

EL: They don't know how to draw, otherwise. They just sit there and go, "This is what I do. I can't draw, I physically can't pull it off unless I've got a drawing board covered with stuff."

DRAW!: So you just like to get inspired, then sit down and hit the board and—

EL: Yeah, I'll sit there and read a bunch of comics on the can, and then it'll be, "Oh, cool! I'm ready to go!"

THE SCHEDULE

DRAW!: Now, you have to turn out a book every three weeks or so?

EL: It's supposed to be every month. At this point I'm trying to catch up because of doing the *Defenders* and doing the *Fantastic Four* book. I've kind of worked myself into a nice little hole where I'm really far behind. And also I'm doing issue 100 of *Dragon*, which, like an idiot, I decided let's do a 100-page issue, but I'll draw it all myself.

DRAW!: So you aren't getting a bunch of guest stars to come in and do chapters?

EL: No. The thing is, whenever I would do a comic and there would be a back-up, it didn't even matter how beautiful it was... Adam Hughes never pencils anything. I got him to pencil a ten-page story in an issue of *Dragon*. And people were bitching because they thought they got ripped off because I only gave them sixteen pages of *my* stuff. "You've got 26 pages of stuff! Shut up! And ten pages of Adam Hughes, who never pencils anything, for crying out loud! Shut the hell up and leave me alone!" [laughter] They react to other people's work as though it were ads or something. That stuff doesn't count as part of the whole package.

DRAW!: Guess you can't please everyone. The *Dragon* fans are Erik Larsen fans...

EL: They're very specific. I like what *you* give me, and what

somebody else does, no matter who the hell they are, they feel really ripped off. And there was a short while there where people were going, "Boy, your inks aren't what they ought to be." So I thought, in issue 100 I'm going to pencil ten different backups and give them out to ten different inkers. And then I'll do the lead story myself. So we'll see. [laughter] They'll either love it or loathe it, but I'm hoping that the guys I got doing stuff will come in and use my pencils as a basic guide and do what they do. These days I'm really pleased when an inker doesn't ink my stuff line for line. I can do that!

COLORING

DRAW!: How much input do you have over the coloring on the *Dragon*? Do you work very closely with the colorists?

EL: I do, yes. At this point they've been coloring the book for nine years, so there's a certain amount of basic trust there. But whenever there's any new characters that are introduced, there's always a discussion of, okay, what color are these guys? What's this about? What color do you see this guy's energy that he's firing? What color do you see that being? Different things like that. When I went and we switched over to doing *Dragon* in "the Savage World" stuff, I told them that I wanted to get the book to be colored in more primary colors. I wanted the *Dragon* to be brighter, to sort of read and look more like a good old Marvel comic or something but without it being completely flat coloring.

DRAW!: So you sort of describe scenes? You say, "This is a night scene, this is a day scene, this is a..."

EL: All throughout. There will be liner notes sometimes. Sometimes there won't. It just depends on what it is. There's always a discussion of what time of day it is or where the light source should be. Again, in the "Savage World" stuff we decided early on that as long as the world was messed up the sky would *never* be blue so there was often a discussion of what color it should be this time. When there are scene changes I'll want that to be emphasized. This room will be all blues—that one will be all red. Things like that.

DRAW!: Does being one of the founding members of Image cut into your time at all?

EL: No. It doesn't take anything. Zero. Totally zero. Every now and then there will be an Image meeting where we've got something that needs to be voted on or something like that, but for the most part, there is no day-to-day function that I need to perform.

DRAW!: I just wondered if part of your business day required you once or twice a month to have to deal with a certain amount of Image business, or *Dragon* business related to Image, and things like that, and how you fit that all in.

EL: The things that I end up dealing with a little bit... I end up dealing with the printers a little bit, the people outputting film... all the way down the road, I'm part of this book. It's all a



LARSEN: On this drawing the fire had a Presto Fine Point Jumbo Correction Pen from Pentel dragged over it and the other effects were made by dragging an X-acto knife over the page which digs up the paper in an interesting way.

process. When the coloring is done, it's sent to me. Either I'll go over to San Francisco and go over proofs there, or over the internet.

DRAW!: So they send you JPEGs?

EL: Yeah, they send me JPEGs or we go over proofs. It's JPEGs these days. That's worked out easier.

DRAW!: Are you Photoshop savvy? Do you use the computer much for the Dragon?

EL: Not a lot. Enough to be able to go in with a paint bucket and drop in a color.

DRAW!: So do you ever scan in your art or anything, or is that all taken care of by the colorist?

EL: They do it, but I'm going to be doing it. As time goes on, things change, and the next step in this process is that I will be scanning art and e-mailing TIFFs over to the colorists rather than physically giving them the pages.

DRAW!: I'm sure that will save a lot of time and money. A lot

of people are doing that now, FTPing things back and forth. It's just so much more convenient. If you only get two pages done, as soon as it's done, boom! You just send it over.

EL: That's beautiful. But I'm assuming I'll find some way to screw that up. *[laughter]*

DRAW!: It's pretty foolproof. *[laughter]* If it was that difficult to do, nobody would be doing it.

EL: I just think that I'm going to be more and more... the biggest problem with the way I work is that I'll tend to want to go, "Well, I want to do *this* panel now, but I don't want to do the rest of the page." So I'll have, like, eighteen pages that I'm working on simultaneously. *[laughter]* That doesn't please *anybody*. At some point you've got to actually finish these things and get them off to people.

DRAW!: I think a lot of artists work that way, work on several pages at once. I do that same thing myself. Especially when I ink, I sort of spread the wealth. Do you know what I mean? I figure if I'm having a slow day or an off day, you kind of spread it over four or five pages, a panel here, a panel there, it's not so bad.

EL: It's a little hard to quantify what the hell you've done at the end of the day. "Well, how many pages did you get done? I don't really know." *[laughter]*

DRAW!: You feel like you worked all day, but...

EL: "I kind of did. I don't know, could be ten, could be a hundred."

DRAW!: So do you see yourself embracing things like the WACOM tablet, using a digital tablet to draw at all...?

EL: No way. Uh-uh. I like having the physical artwork. I don't like sitting there staring at a screen. I don't want to do that.

DRAW!: You're all charged up now! Do you ever begin the day by sketching first?

EL: No. That's never happened.

DRAW!: So when do you do your sketching?

EL: I don't know... it just appears on the backs of pages and envelopes. But these days I don't do much if any sketching at all. It'll be, like, when I'm on the phone sometimes I'll sit there and "vege out" and start doodling something, but I don't do a lot. It depends on what I'm doing and what I'm working through, too. Because there will be different periods where I'll be going, "I want to draw this issue in a cartoonier fashion." So I'll maybe work out what the characters are going to look like if they're a little more cartoony. It can be any variety of things. I'll be reintroducing a character, and, "I haven't drawn this character in four or five years. I think the next time Mighty Man shows up, I want him to have more of a C.C. Beck vibe. And maybe I'll just do, here he is with these big dot eyes." Well, how do I rec-



INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD: CUT AS SHOWN; ABUT PAGE EDGES, TAPE ON BACK. DO NOT OVERLAP.

LARSEN: More penciled pages for *Thor*. Klaus Janson did a bang-up job inking these pages. At this point I was writing, penciling and inking *Savage Dragon* and doing breakdowns on the *Mighty Thor* and the *Amazing Spider-Man*. Klaus inked *Thor*, John Beatty inked *Spidey*. It was a gas! Both Klaus and John added their own elements that made the stuff shine.

oncile that it's a realistic drawing with dot eyes, or do I just go, "Ah, whatever"? [laughter]

DRAW!: Do you do much drawing outside of the context of working on the book? Drawing for pleasure, like sketching, life drawing, or anything?

EL: No. It's all about comics.

DRAW!: Did you used to before you were doing it on such a monthly basis?

EL: Not as much as I should have. I've never been one to try to figure out how to draw my wife or something. Because I suck at it. [laughter] You don't want to sit around doing stuff you suck at all day long.

DRAW!: So you find it frustrating?

EL: Yeah. It's just, like, "Oh, man, I can't pull this off." I've never been that good at doing caricatures and stuff. But every now and then I'll work my way into a corner where I have to do it in the comic. I'll have Clinton show up. "Oh, man, how am I going to draw Clinton? I don't know what to do."

DRAW!: Do you ever bone up on anatomy or things like that?

EL: Not as much as I ought to. But like every other comic book guy, for the most part, it's all this fake anatomy. It's not really real. I'm not pretending that it's 100% accurate. I just find something that works. It's like, "Oh, this back doesn't look like a back. But, you know, it's kind of a cool-looking thing anyway." [laughter]

DRAW!: So you're drawing the cartoon impression of a back, I suppose?

EL: Yeah. You know, I enjoy people who are able to do super-realistic stuff. I

appreciate that that happens. But it's not really my gig. I've always been much more influenced by, say, Jack Kirby, who would just kind of do what feels like a back. "I don't know what a back really looks like, but it kind of feels something like this." [laughter] The impression of a knee is this kind of circular thing.

DRAW!: I always find it interesting when I talk to artists like

you to find out... There are artists that are always studying and keep sketchbooks and have piles of sketches and do life drawing. And there are artists who used to do it but don't do it anymore because now they're working ten, twelve hours a day and the last thing they feel like doing when they're done is drawing anything else. So it's always interesting to see. Supposedly, Gil Kane would still practice warm-ups and stuff, Buscema as well.

EL: Which may explain why Gil was still pretty damn good right up until the day he kicked off. That's the way we're *supposed* to be doing. I worked through those periods where I was sitting there with the Bridgman books open and figuring out okay, an arm does *this* and a leg does *this* and all this other stuff, and it just got to a point where I'd figured out my half-assed anatomy. I'm just going to use *this*. I mean, I still see stuff and I still take in information. There will still be stuff that I'll be getting either by looking at a magazine with a picture of somebody in it or a drawing that somebody else has done.

DRAW!: If you see something that strikes you, a picture that would be good for reference, do you ever clip it out for a swipe or something for lighting effects or things like that?

EL: Nope, I never do. My room is such a sty right now, with just stuff stacked all over the place. I've never had the patience to put together a decent swipe file. So when it comes to actually having to draw something real, I'm really, like, "Uh-oh. I'm in trouble." [laughter]

DRAW!: Well, now you can just go on the Web and say, "I need a 1967 Volkswagen," and—click, click it's there.

EL: That's the cool thing too, that you can do that. Thank God for the Web.

DRAW!: In the old days, you'd have to clip out *Car and Driver* or something and build these huge files.

EL: And now you can just go in, grab a car, toss it into Photoshop, put high contrast on it and turn it into a black and white drawing, print it out, paste it up, call it beautiful. [laughter] I've done most everything like that, too, where I just go, "What's a way of doing this that would look cool." I've pulled off photos and then gone in and drawn on top of them.

DRAW!: That's a tried and true old newspaper strip technique that artists like Stan Drake and Leonard Starr would do. They'd do a shot of a city and they wouldn't want to draw the whole city, so they'd find a photo, high contrast xerox it, touch it up a little bit and paste it down.

EL: Yeah, beautiful. Call it a day. There's stuff I've done like that. Depending where you go... if you go to Japan, and I've been to Japan, they've got books and books that the whole point of them is, "Here, swipe this."

DRAW!: Oh, right, right. Exactly.

EL: "Oh, wow, look, there's a background. I don't have to draw that background, I can just copy it and paste it in and call it beautiful."

DRAW!: Or two Japanese girls holding sub-machine guns. From every angle, angles you would never draw.

EL: Ready to go. I haven't done much in the way... I don't know of any figure work that I've taken that way, but there's been a couple of buildings in there that, "Oh, man, this will save my ass." Various things. And turn it into my stuff; otherwise it would look weird to me.

DRAW!: Well, I think that's a really important thing. That's a real key thing, that when an artist like Kirby had to draw a Corvette, he converted it into a *Jack Kirby Corvette* instead of all of a sudden there's this paste-down of a Corvette where you'd go, "Well, that kind of stands out." He kind of put it through his own machine.

EL: Yeah. And then he did these montages and you'd go, "What the hell?" [laughter]

DRAW!: Yeah, what kind of mushrooms did Kirby have on his pizza when he did that?

EL: Those are the ones where I would go, "That's not working too well for me there, Jack. I'd rather see even a half-assed drawing than that."



THE SAVAGE DRAGON © 2006 ERIK LARSEN

THE KING

DRAW!: Who do you look at today for inspiration? Do you still go back and look at the old guys?

EL: I just look at Jack.

DRAW!: You just look at Jack?

EL: Yeah.

DRAW!: It all begins and ends with Jack?

EL: Pretty much. It always goes back there. There will be something where I'll pick up a comic and be jazzed about it. Then I'll sit down and go, "Okay, I can't pull *that* off, but Jack... I've kind of got some of *that* vibe going." [laughter] I love the energy in Jack's work and few people can pull that off. Jack never let reality slow him down. He never let realism rein him in and *that* is very much how I approach my work. If it means losing a section of a leg to pull off a cool pose I'll do it in a second. Hands the size of loaves of bread? I'm there!

DRAW!: Do you have particular favorite Kirby periods?

EL: I have several. Pretty much everything he did at DC except for the last maybe six months to a year, when suddenly he was just getting...

DRAW!: Like *Kung-Fu Fighter*?

EL: Yeah. Those things suck. *The Avenger* or *Justice Incorporated*, whatever. Those are just, like, holy crap! Those are awful. They're uninspired. But *Kamandi* was pretty bitchin' from day one. But his Marvel stuff is just incredible. That earlier stuff. As soon as Joe Sinnott came aboard on a regular basis, really, *FF* #44-102, that's my Bible. Comics don't get any better than that. That's about it. Tell me a better comic. I'll go out and buy it and then tell you you're full of it. On an artistic level, to me, that's just the most exciting stuff ever. And I've since discovered... I never had *Thor* when I was a kid. I hated Vinnie's inks. But I've grown to appreciate it, and even occasionally been influenced by it, where I'll be, like, "I've got to pull that off."

DRAW!: You've got to ink a real scratchy arm.

EL: There's something about that stuff. People who hate Jack Kirby, you show them those issues of *Thor* where he's going at it with Hercules and stuff like that. Suddenly, they're like, "Oh, yeah, this guy's pretty good." Because they see all those lines on there, and to them, that's a drawing, that's a work of art, when it's just these contours with squiggles on them. I don't even know what that is, that doesn't even look like an arm to them. But when it's got a hundred million lines on it like that, that's something cool. They can appreciate it.

DRAW!: As a kid, I got the Marvels both as reprints, so I saw the *FF* stuff and *Thor* stuff at the same time. Initially, I liked the Colletta stuff. It was as I got older and became a budding artist



LARSEN: Sometimes I'll just draw poses in my sketchbook or on the backs of pages. Later on, when I get stuck coming up with a cover or splash I'll just flip through my stacks of drawings and pull out a pose that I'd worked out before.

that I disliked Colletta's work. But I still have a fondness for that stuff, just because the stories are so good.

EL: Oh yeah. There was a period there where... once Hercules got into the mix, and starting there right up through and that led into the whole Ego story, and that led right into the High Evolutionary stuff. There's a twenty-issue span in which is just incredible comics. A lot of cool stuff being thrown at you one after another.

DRAW!: Stuff thrown away, almost, just to see... He just had so many concepts in there...

EL: Yeah. But the nice thing about the collaboration of him and [Stan] Lee is that I think, if anything, Lee had a way of reining Jack in so he would focus on certain things. Jack on his own... like, *New Gods*, is a mess, where he would just introduce one concept and throw it away. And another, and throw it away. And things were started up that didn't go anywhere at all. There were, like, a bunch of humans in the first few issues, and those human beings didn't end up doing anything or going anywhere or having anything to do with the rest of the story. And the dialogue was all kind of weird and stilted. It *seems* like it's got a lot of cool stuff, and all of the individual issues on their own are pretty neat, but, taken as a whole, the series really had no focus and no direction and just meandered. Throwing out a million things all at once. It would be really nice if there had been someone to come in and polish the dialogue a little bit. I mean there was a line of dialogue in an issue where Terrible Turpin went on a rant about UFOs and it was clear by the way Jack wrote it that he thought UFO just meant something weird. Turpin said, "Don't put down UFOs! You don't see anyone wearing derby hats!—But I do!—Does that make *me* a UFO?" [laughter] Somebody *really* should have pointed out that UFO stands for Unidentified Flying Object! If someone could have been there to help Jack focus on telling a complete coherent story before he jumped onto his next idea those books could have been more successful, I think.

DRAW!: Knowing that, do you have anybody give you feedback on your writing? Do you have a sounding board?

EL: No. [laughter]

DRAW!: No? You're out there on the stage all by yourself, right?

EL: Yup, yup. Really, the sounding board is just the readers. And that's not a sounding board beforehand, it's a sounding board after, where you just go, "Well, they say I blew this one. Maybe I can have something to do with that." The only problem with listening to that voice is that it's just not immediate enough. Okay, I've got this information, but they're responding to issue 97 and I'm working on 99, so I can't even necessarily follow up on it at all.

DRAW!: Do you ever show the work to your wife at all?

EL: No, not at all. She doesn't read comics, she doesn't follow

comics, it's never been part of her world. We've been married for ten years, almost, and were dating for four-and-a-half years before that. So at this point, seeing another comic book has just never been a part of what she's done. She read the first couple issues but that's it. She just doesn't like the comic book format. She doesn't like searching the panels, "looking for the bubbles" as she calls it.

DRAW!: So it's not like you send your stuff out to the other guys at Image and they give you feedback or anything?

EL: Certainly not, no. That's *never* happened. We've never been like that. When we were with Malibu, Malibu was kind of like, "Send this stuff all around so you can all check out each other's stuff." But once we broke off from them that stopped.

DRAW!: So you have complete creative freedom to go in just about any direction you want.

EL: Yeah. Absolutely. And there's no editor to say, "Well, you really need to follow up on this or do that." So my stuff's as much of a mess as anything else. [laughter]

DRAW!: I think a lot of artists would envy you and would love to be in that position, where you have the absolute, and probably sometimes scary, creative freedom.

EL: It's neat, though, because you can really set the stuff up and follow it through. And I'm kind of doing what a lot of people kind of looked as what they always wanted in comics. You're reading comics, you're a kid. Then you start getting older, and then it's like, "God, I'm getting to the point now where I'm older than Peter Parker. What happened there? I used to be *younger* than Peter Parker when I started reading them. What if Peter Parker kept up with me and got older as I got older, wouldn't that be neat?" You're not thinking, "Yeah, it will be kind of crappy for the next guy who comes along, who's going to be reading about a forty-year-old Peter Parker," but, as a kid, the idea that I'm going to get older and suddenly Robin's going to be much younger than me instead of my age and pretty soon I'm going to be older than Batman, and I'll be looking at stuff... "Aw, man. Wouldn't that be cool?" So what I decided to do was basically set *Dragon* in real time, so that characters in the book would get older and fatter and balder and fall apart. [laughter] And *Dragon* starts off bald anyway, so he'll remain relatively unaffected by time. He'll just get a little more wrinkly or whatever. You're not going to see a huge amount of change in him, physically, from issue one to one hundred. But it'll be kind of cool with some of the supporting characters to go, "Oh, here is this girl that was kind of this foxy broad when we started off the series and now gravity's taken hold and things are slipping and sliding." I should back up a bit. I have looked and do look at a lot of different artists other than Jack. Walt Simonson, Gil Kane, Frank Miller, Herb Trimpe, Pete Costanza, Milt Caniff, Steve Ditko, John Byrne and a host of others have inspired me over the years and helped shape me and my work but it always comes back to Kirby. Nobody else pulls off the scope that Jack has. I just eat that stuff up. There are a lot of creators who have done terrific work. It all inspires me to some degree.

THE FUTURE

DRAW!: Where do you see yourself ten years from now? Do you see yourself hopefully doing issue #200 of the *Dragon* or whatever?

EL: Ten years from now I hope to be working on issue #220. Keep on trucking. I expect that time will change and that there will be other things that will be going on, but... I don't know. I'm willing to hang in here as long as I can.

DRAW!: Do you see yourself changing format? Would you do *Dragon* on the Web, or would you do the comics but do them on the Web?

EL: I hate the Web for comics. I don't like to sit there and look at the screen. The only thing that's kind of cool about the Web is that it approximates the crappy printing that we used to have. [laughter] Whenever I get JPEGs and stuff and send them to people, they're always like, "Oh, that's really cool!" Because they assume that it's going to look a lot better and sharper when it sees print. Your eye kind of fills this stuff in. It's like looking at old comics and thinking, "This stuff looks really, really good." And then you see the original art and go, "Wow, that was a lot cruder than I thought it was."

DRAW!: So you don't see yourself doing the same sort of stories in another format or another platform or...?

EL: It's not impossible. I would hope that it wasn't on the Web. I just like the idea of having it be something you can hold and take with you to the bathroom or read on a bus or something like that. If it was totally tanking out and not working, I could see going, "Well, I'll do... every six months there will be a graphic novel coming out." Instead of it being periodical.

DRAW!: So you prefer paper to pixels, is what you're saying.

EL: Oh, yeah! Vastly.

DRAW!: I know you have a website for the *Dragon*, www.savage-dragon.com. Are you very active in that?

EL: The only thing I'm active in is participating in whatever message boards are on there and keeping that sort of stuff updated so that people have answers to whatever questions they've got. It's important for me, anyway, to keep that line of communication open for my audience. I don't know. The idea of doing comics that are on line just sitting there... I mean, the screen sizes are different than the page dimensions, then you'd have to be doing all kinds of other things to make it look okay. It's sort of like, "Oh, I guess I'll have to draw everything sideways now..."

DRAW!: Oh, so you're talking about changing the whole format, the ratio.

EL: The whole nine yards. And I don't know that I really want to do that. I like the format the way it is. I like these comics. I



LARSEN: I laid out nine of the 12 issues of *Fantastic Four: The World's Greatest Comics Magazine*. Plot pages started out like this...



And ended up looking like this. There were a few artists who flat out ignored what I did but it gave them a starting place nonetheless.

started off doing this. This is kind of what I wanted to do when I started up. The thing I would *love* to do, would be to make comics more affordable and to make them more for your money than they are. That's one thing I *don't* like now, that comics are three dollars and they're 22 pages and that's it.

DRAW!: So would you like to give them a higher page count?

EL: I would like to. I would love to do *Dragon* as a 64-page monthly comic that had *Dragon* as the lead feature and there's ten pages of this and five pages of that—I'm not sure how possible that is but it's something I'd like to do. There are folks who contribute strips to the back of *Savage Dragon* right now and plenty of others who'd like to participate and see their work in print. I'd love to do a sketchbook section or tips on breaking in or drawing. To show folks layouts and the finished product and whatnot would be terrific. Comics cost too much. I'd love to give a book more value. Add more things to read. I could see laying out a mess of stories the way that I did on *Fantastic Four: World's Greatest Comic Magazine* and getting young talent to draw them as a sort of way of getting their work out there and learning the basics of clear storytelling. The problem is money, of course. Printing books costs money and if you don't raise the cover price it means more is going out while less is coming in. But the guys who contribute strips have done it as an exercise and for experience. There are aspiring creators who simply want to see their work in print. In some cases everything can be done for no money. It's sort of like running pages of fan art only it's sequential storytelling instead. I don't know. Maybe I'm talking out of my butt here but it just seems that it's possible to do so much more than is being done. In the Golden Age comics were 64 pages for a dime. Why can't we do that now? I mean, a dime might be pushing it—I'm not suicidal after all. Still, it seems like it shouldn't have to be *just* 32 page books. Comics can be so much more than what they are. In any case—that's what I'm thinking.



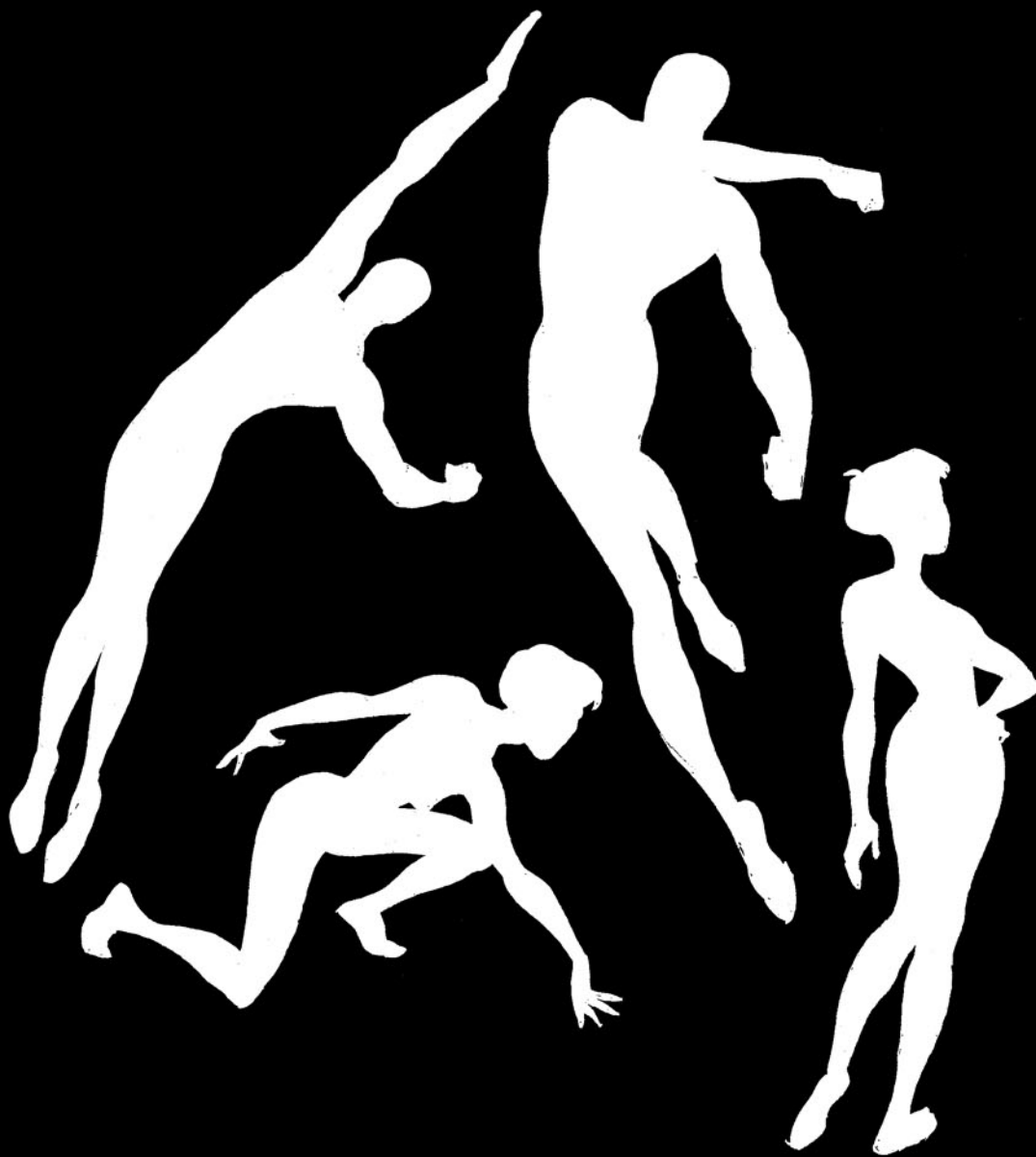
SUB-MARINER, THE HULK, DR. STRANGE, THE DEFENDERS © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

Issue 6 page 3 Penciller



LARSEN: A spread from *Defenders* #6. Amiable Al Gordon inked this issue and did a mighty fine job at it. The start of this issue was a tip of the hat to an old favorite of mine—Happy Herb Trimpe! I grew up reading Herb's *Incredible Hulk* and the Bi-Beast was a big favorite of mine. I made an effort to try and give the Bi-Beast that Trimpe look. Al's slick inks were perfect! Sal Buscema inked the following issues and he did a splendid job as well. I've really been blessed during my career. I've gotten to work with some of the most talented creators in the biz. You guys are tops!





COMPOSING FIGURES

Composing figures in groups is essentially a multiplication and combination of the principles discussed in previous *DRAW!* articles—particularly silhouetting. When grouping several figures you must choose a dominant character (or characters), and arrange the secondary figures to support him, her or them. I've assembled a set of examples and explained their structure and design—you'll see that there are many approaches to establishing clarity and controlling the viewer's focus.

The diagrams vary in the compositional elements they explain—lines or shapes ending in arrows indicate “eye flow” and accent the controls or aides that direct the paths a viewer's eye follows when looking at an image. Other shapes and lines indicate balance, placement, scale, rhythm or a combination of these elements. In some of the examples I've used words to describe the narrative motivations of the composition and left the analysis of visual mechanics to you.

Silhouetting is so fundamental to good composition we'll revisit it here—each figure you draw should scan or “read” clearly as a flat pattern—a simple device for achieving this is to insure each pose can be understood as a solid black shape—it takes only a moment to verify this in a rough doodle, or by actually laying a piece of tracing paper over a figure and blacking in its contour. (Or just outlining it, though the black is more vivid.) Even though interior definition and detail can explain a poorly silhouetted figure (or any other subject), a composition will always be stronger and more satisfying if each element in it can be scanned as a flat shape. Poor shape clarity of any part of a visual composition weakens its force, much as a sour note or out of key instrument spoils a musical composition. Here are a group of silhouetted poses of figures randomly selected from the following demonstration pages—as you look through the article see if you can find them and notice how effectively their clarity as a flat pattern compliments and strengthens the entire composition.



Marvel Comics ILLUSTRATION QUALITY PAPER FOR REGULAR COMIC PAGES
 Book SLEEPWALKER Issue # 3 pg # 1

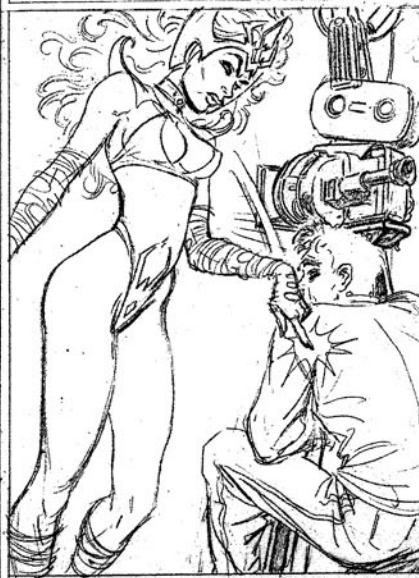


The monster is an amateur actor grabbing an amateur actress on a cardboard set, hence the coy body language and the unimpressive background. the composition is structured over an "X" shape to keep the viewer's attention focused on the odd characters

I N D I C I A + C R E D I T S

Once again, character motivation is the starting point of any figure composition—what is this person (or group) like? Kindly, indifferent, cruel? What are they doing? Why are they doing it? Are they scared? Angry? Delighted? Nervous? Confused? Worried? Each characteristic or combination dictates a different treatment, pose, acting, and of course—composition. Here are a few images and detailed explanations of their structure.

When composing action decide what the narrative or emotional point of the scene is and design accordingly. The variety of possibilities here are as endless as the range of human emotion—these examples represent just a sampling of the endless amplitude of body language and dramatic situation human (or other) beings can express and experience.



Panel 1: She throws a smoke bomb in front of her assailant—most of the main compositional lines direct attention to the burst.

Panel 2: closer as the unseen director calls “cut”—the sudden change in both characters’ attitude tell us the conflict is fake. the horizontal shape of the panel shows the pace a bit, too.

Panel 3: wide to reveal the college movie set, the cameraman and director.

Panel 4: the director and actress have dialogue here—he speaks first, then she complains about the stench of the smoke, but a third key story point is the cameraman’s exhausted yawn. careful silhouetting explains each in proper left-to-right reading order.

Panel 5: as she walks by she chastises the groggy yawner, who is also her boyfriend, though she is annoyed with him. Her tilting, finger prodding figure looms over his and crowds him down into the corner of the frame—the heavy weight of the camera placement adds to his oppression and clearly communicates he’s in the dog-house.





Panel 1. The converging lines of the screen is both explaining the content of the scene and directing the viewer's eye toward the central story point—the quarrelsome couple. The director's left arm also directs attention toward our center of interest—and along with his gaze points toward the screen...

Panel 2: We jump close on him as he starts the film.

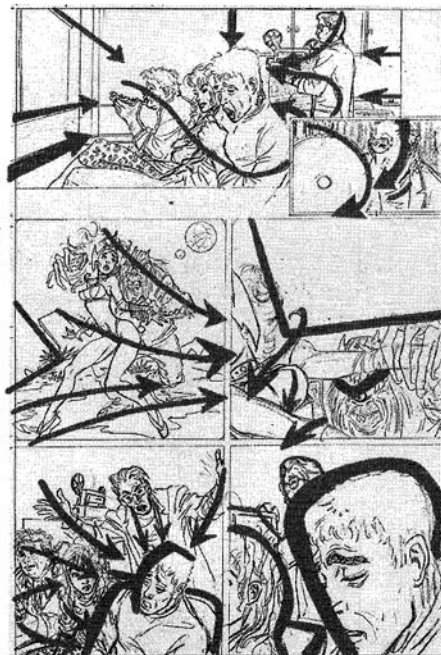
Panel 3: We see the opening shot from page one, now projected on the screen.

Panel 4. This interesting panel can serve two purposes here—as part of this story sequence. It functions as mistake on the part of our poor cameraman—his lax attention allowed the camera to slip and miss the crucial part of the action—but as a demonstration of composition it is an excellent example of bad cropping. We've lost the girl's facial expression and the top half of the picture space is pointlessly empty.



Panel 5: Now our hero catches flack for his bungle—the waving arm of the director, the glare of the actors, the tilt of the seated group (accented by the chair backs), and the “flinching away” gesture of our sleepy friend make it clear that he is no one's hero at the moment.

Panel 6: As the others turn back to view the rest of the film, we focus on the cameraman and his chagrin.



Here the couple is massed into one silhouette to accent their togetherness.

The converging of perspective lines of the background seem to press them even closer to each other.



They are separated here in space and distance though she is looking toward (and relating to) him.



Here her tired and unconsciously beautiful pose has arrested his attention—the converging lines of the background elements focus the viewer's eyes on her, too; the empty space behind his head conveys that all his thoughts are on her now.



His weary, wistful look tells us that his mind is no longer on food, but also hints that he is unsure she feels the same,



As he gently touches her, the expression on her face and the direction of her gaze (away from him) tell us she is not feeling intimate.



She jerks away from him—the position of his hand reveals the suddenness of her movement.

The sharp angular forms of the staircase jut between them, symbolizing the antagonism that separates them both in space and empathy. She still avoids meeting his eyes.

The long horizontal composition slows the pace—long silent minutes pass as she falls asleep, or perhaps pretends to, boxed in by hard angular forms that isolate her from her husband...

...who remains alone downstairs, slumped in a bleak pool of lamplight.

...and we jump close to read his eyes as he listens to bad news.

The device on his belt beeps...

ARTIST AND LETTERS: THE "LINE ART AREA" IS WITHIN THE 6 1/8" x 13 3/4" DOTTED LINE RECTANGLE. YOU MUST KEEP ALL LETTERING AND IMPORTANT ART WITHIN THIS AREA.

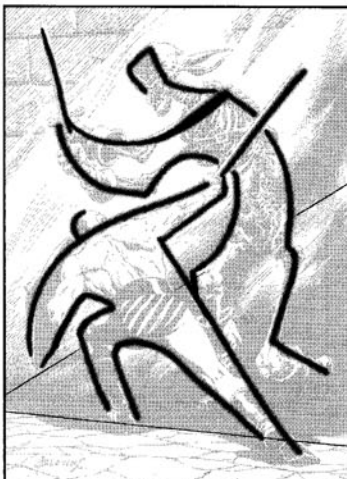
COPYRIGHT © 1999 DC COMICS INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES MAY THIS BE REPRODUCED WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

SYNCO DC 9002 © KNOX ARTWORK AND SCAVCHAM JTY
INDICIA AREA FOR PG. 1

The same rules of eye-direction, shape clarity, silhouetting and balance apply to single images.

The technical challenges of composing figure groupings revolve around the same principles of clarity and “eye flow” that any composition must address. Often the simplest way to illustrate these principles is to explain how not to arrange a composition:

THE PHANTOM TM AND © 2006 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE



THE NEW MUTANTS ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.



Common Errors and Problems To Avoid:**Tangents**

Tangents are contours (outlines) of two separate forms that meet or touch in an unfortunate alignment of edges and become visually “attached,” destroying each form’s clear identity and depth separation in space. It’s always an improvement to either separate or overlap the shapes:

**No Center of Interest**

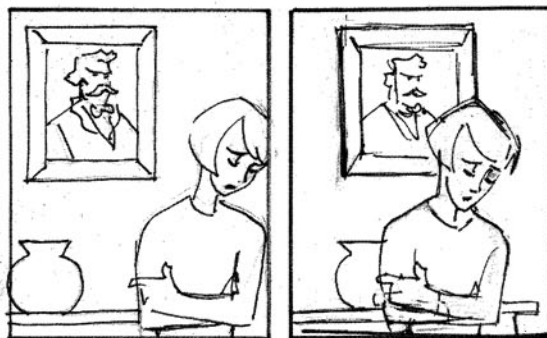
Always remember that nothing in a good composition is arbitrary—every shape and its placement is performing a necessary function. Directing all the elements toward achieving your purpose is priority one, and a basic requirement is to establish a center of interest and arrange everything in the composition to support and direct attention to it.



What are we supposed to notice and assign importance to in these pictures? The compositions don't tell us.

Neglect of Borders

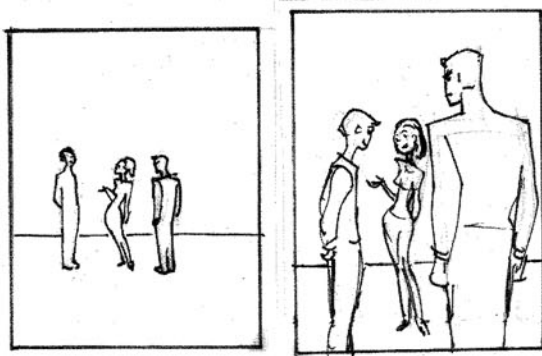
The border of your image is the Rosetta Stone of your composition—it frames and provides the key to the structure of everything it contains. In these examples notice how careless use of borders can weaken the strength of an image, and the defining power cropping choices have on the emotional content and impact of a subject.



In the first image no thought has been given to the presence of the borders and their effect on the picture. The second image utilizes the borders to bring the elements into a harmonious relationship.

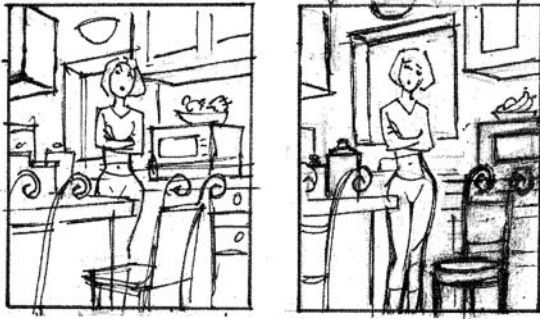
Lack of Scale

Dramatic manipulation of scale is another basic compositional device—use it to convey theme (menace, insignificance, etc.), provide eye path direction, or just to add pleasing variety to a group of figures. Imaginative use of scale can often enliven a static or boring scene.



Lack of Integration

A common weakness in narrative artwork is absence of harmony between figures and their environment. As stressed above, every element of a background (shapes) must be related to the figures, must be utilized to support the center of interest and focus attention on it. The environment around figures is a crucial part of a picture's success, not an indifferent "backdrop."



Is the first image about the woman or the clutter of the room she's in? The second image has been brought into harmony by arranging the background elements to support her as the center of interest.

Composition of visual images involves much more than a knowledge of figure drawing, as we've seen—this short article can only hint at the depths one can explore in pursuit of an effective arrangement of two-dimensional shapes and lines on a surface. I'll leave you with this thought:

Design (good or bad, intentional or accidental) is the foundation of all picture making, and an understanding of composition is the means of controlling it and insuring your design is good. Design is also a bottomless and endlessly fascinating subject—when composing, the visual options and choices are (for all practical purposes) infinite. Study of the principles of design will open a vista that can captivate your enthusiasm every day of your life—this aspect of picturemaking is never exactly the same twice, and developing a love for it will enable you to avoid boredom and formula in your work.

Every mark you make within the borders of your picture is a mark you placed exactly there and nowhere else. Why exactly there? Make sure you know before you commit to that mark, or shape, or line, or tone. Intuition will inspire and guide you—but knowledge can save you when a composition is in trouble.

See you next issue.

Bret 



Each character in this mob scene has been carefully posed and individually silhouetted, though many overlap. In the chart I've accented the main "hinge" of composition—the two figures at the lower left an arc (aided by the wing of the top left character) that is opposed to the repeated rhythmic arcs formed by the heroes confronting them. The tension is mild and understand because the point of this actionless scene is the display of the mass of heroes—the gentle "parentheses" of directional shapes that bracket the composition allow the eye to wander over the parade at a leisurely pace—the meander is stopped and reversed by the stretching neck and head of Mr. Fantastic directing attention back into the picture.





The acting of the characters is a key element of this page. Gesture that clearly conveys the emotional attitude is crucial in this sort of crowded expositional sequence—a short breather in a complicated action story that gives the reader a chance to catch up on the plot and keep motivations straight. The first panel is essentially an underscore of the explanatory dialogue, but also an opportunity to reveal personality—each character is behaving appropriately and enhancing the viewer's understanding of them. Next they separate into two groups—then we follow our flying band as they react to a flash of light that returns them to danger and action. Note how carefully each figure is placed and silhouetted on this page (even the two small characters I had no reference for, labeled Artie and Leech)—all the story-telling here is achieved by clear staging and body language. In a scene this crowded telegraphic clarity is a must.



The composition on the story page previous to this one (not shown) were open and quiet, to make this sudden plunge into chaos a visual burst of complexity and noise. The intent here was to create a suffocating sense of being overwhelmed by a swarm of scrabbling figures, closing around our heroes like mad insects. Silhouetting is present throughout all the compositions, but extensive overlapping weaves the figures into a layered mosaic of controlled confusion. Control is essential! A confusing composition is not the same thing as a carefully crafted impression of confusion. If the viewer doesn't instantly understand what he's seeing the composition has failed. (This isn't to say that a confusing image is inevitably without aesthetic merit—the point here is that creating such an image should be a matter of choice and command, not serendipity or ineptitude.)



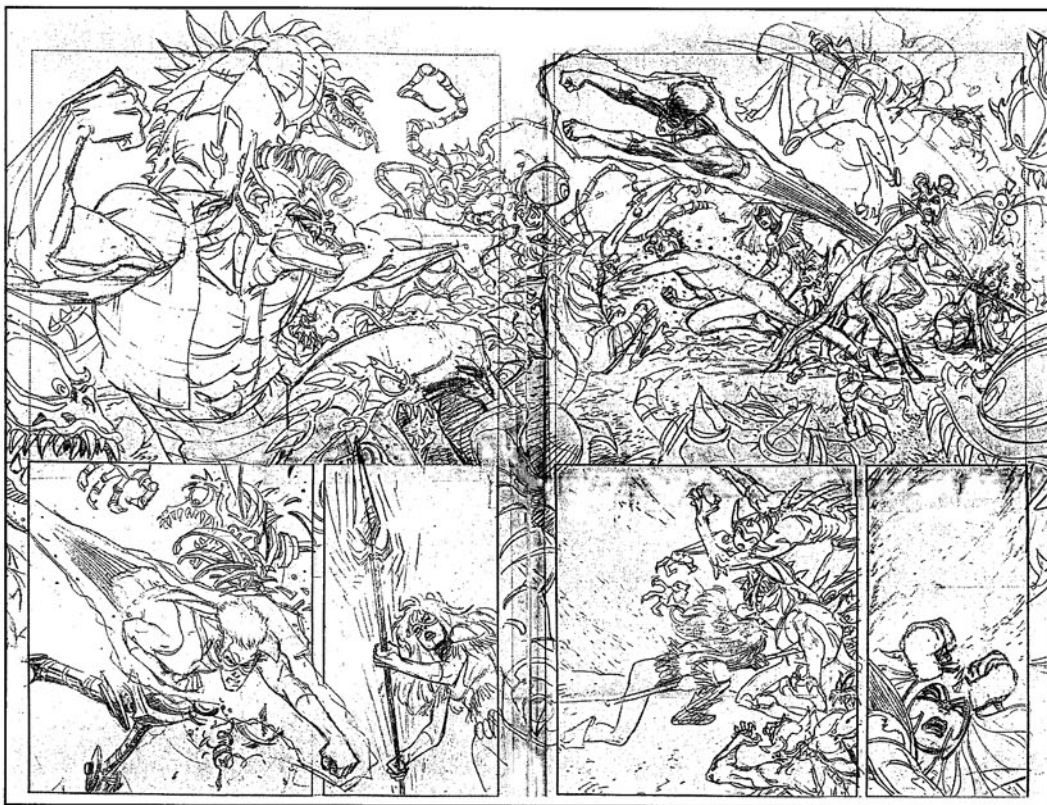
ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

In this slapstick farce the two battling heroes are talking as one by one and entire harem of women plop onto Lester Girl's shoulders. The mad busyness of the compositions and background detail set a frantic pace and accentuate the absurdity of the sequence. The silhouettes are combined throughout to create a spinning kaleidoscope of whirling, off-balance shapes—the central tier of the second page pulls us close, away from the action for a key moment, allowing the next large panel revealing a resigned Lester under a towering pile of women to function as the joke's punchline. (The last two frames of Lester's approaching sweetheart set up the next joke.) In humorous sequential art timing is crucial—pace and juxtaposition become essential compositional skills here.

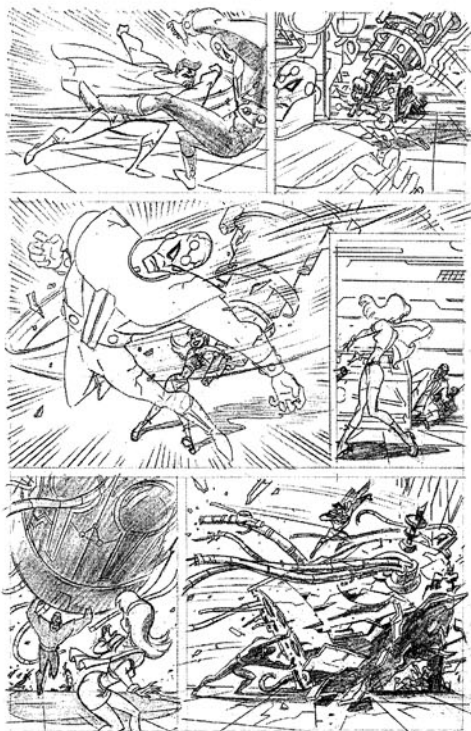


ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

THE NEW MUTANTS AND ALL ARTWORK TM & © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

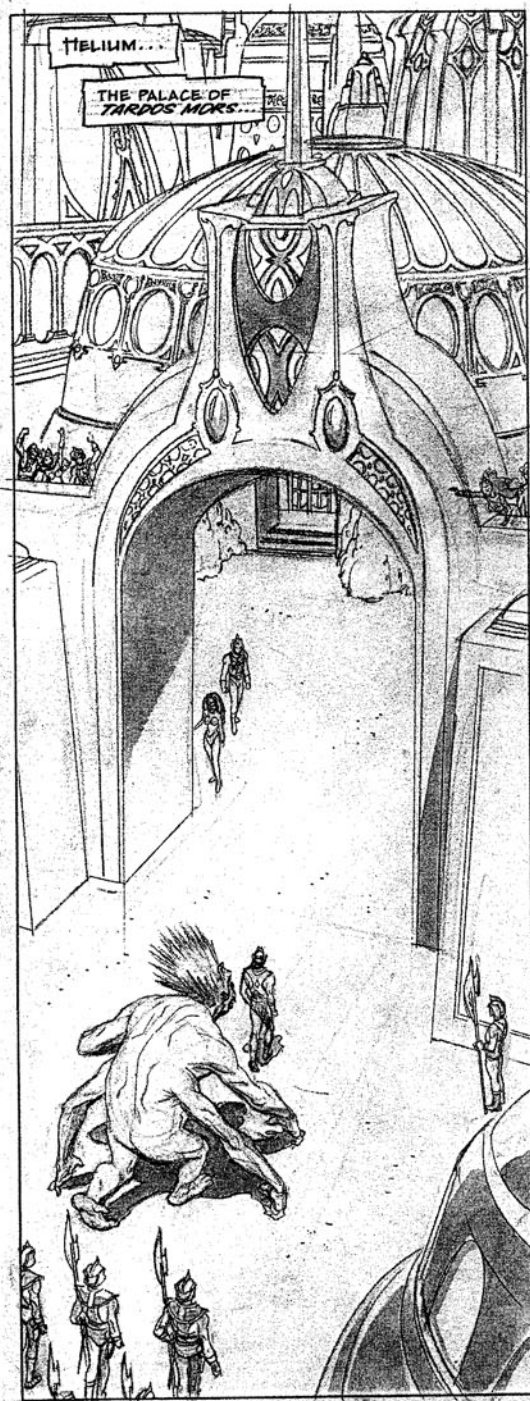


ABOVE: This wildly complex and rolling action spread is a frantic but precisely controlled riot of stylized violence and conflicting directional lines of force. Every shape is moving and surging throughout the entire page. Spend a bit of time tracing the silhouettes with your eye and imagining what a confusing mess it would be without careful planning of each character's shape.



LEFT: This page has an interesting variety of scale and exaggerated action poses that create an exciting battle sequence. The one pause occurs in panel four, as Supergirl turns to share a snatch of dialogue with the professor—the very slight crop of her right foot might be questionable—it comes dangerously close to forming a tangent, but I felt this tiny compromise of her figure helped to subtly shift the emphasis to the professor for a brief instant, strengthening Supergirl's surprise in the following panel.

SUPERMAN, SUPERGIRL, BRAINAC ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK TM & © 2006 DC COMICS.



This quiet sequence achieves its effect by careful attention to naturalistic body language and a dramatic sense of scale. Our main characters (the giant four-armed ape and the human walking in front of him) are being led by force to an uncertain fate and have resolved to go peacefully. The use of scale conveys both a bit of spectacle (the fantasy architecture) and the sublime of the characters (for the moment, of course) to the force of the guards and the powerful society. Black silhouette in the final panel serve the double task of the heroes' separation and focusing attention on the debonair waving gesture of our intrepid captive as he strides into a shadowed future.



This sequence of a lover's spat uses viewpoints, scale and careful gesture acting along with facial expression to convey the tension of a physically almost actionless scene. The tilted angle of the first panel creates directional movement, tells us where the characters are, what they are doing (lunch), and the two conflicting emotional states each is in. The young man is woefully short on sleep for reasons he dare not share, and his resulting inattention to the lovely lady is infuriating her. The following close-up of her annoyed face anticipates the frustrated slamming of the newspaper into the table seen in the next image. (The visible headline is a bit of required plot exposition—showing it upside down inserts it without breaking the emotional rhythm of the character conflict.) Next she storms out, her striding pose and angry gaze leaving no illusions about her feelings—our tired hero is left weakly gesticulating, alone with a very empty chair. The final image takes us close in to share his despondency.



STAR WARS ALL ARTWORK AND CHARACTERS TM AND © 2006 LUCAS FILM LIMITED ©2006 DARK HORSE COMICS

Here scale plays an important role in the structure of the compositions. The focal character seated at the distant table is surrounded and dwarfed by supporting shapes that direct attention to him while holding their individual interest—the viewer's eyes wander over the crowded alien cantina but always return to the figure at the table. He is made important by forming the only strong directional intersection among many curving forms—running his right arm along the key horizontal line strengthens his position as the center of interest.



Now the dueling foreground figures dominate the space, but again our central character's reaction is set up as the focal point of the image.



As he leaves the barfight the slashing diagonals of the action frame him as the attention point—driven home by the arrow shaped two-fisted swing of the female brawler.





USE FOR PASTE-UP ONLY

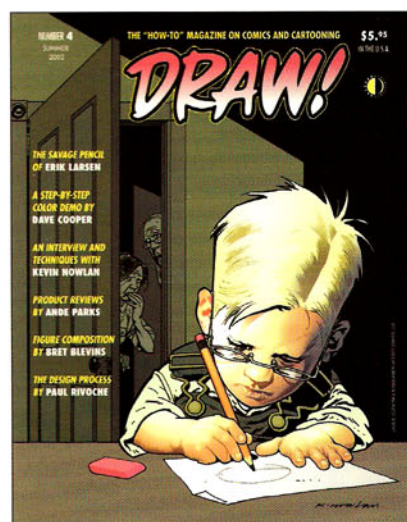
ALL CHARACTERS AND ARTWORK TM AND © 2006 MARVEL CHARACTERS INC.

This scene is a frantic pinwheel of whirling shapes and flying fragments of jagged broken glass, relieved by quieter details; the hand crushing the gun, the villain gesturing with her fingers. Weaving these exposition bits into wild action shots portrays the characters as motivated personalities, not just ciphers for staging stylized violence. Note how carefully the glass shards are placed, creating a chaotic rhythm that doesn't obscure the clarity of the figures.



MR. X TM & © 2006 VORTEX COMICS. ART © PAUL RIVOCHÉ.

The Best of DRAW!, Volume Two compiles material from the sold-out issues #3 and #4 of *DRAW!*, the professional "How-To" magazine on comics and cartooning! Featured here are tutorials by, and interviews with, the top artists in the comics industry: ERIK LARSEN (savage penciling), DICK GIORDANO (inking techniques), BRETT BLEVINS (drawing the figure in action, and figure composition), KEVIN NOWLAN (penciling and inking), MIKE MANLEY (how-to demo on Web Comics), DAVE COOPER (digital coloring tutorial), and more! Learn from the pros as each artist presents their work step-by-step, conveying valuable tricks and tips along the way as it evolves to finished form. It's a must-have for both beginning and experienced artists, as editor MIKE MANLEY assembles this unprecedented wealth of information, including over 25 new pages of never-before published material on storyboarding! Cover by KEVIN NOWLAN!



JACK B. QUICK TM AND © 2006 AMERICA'S BEST COMICS LLC



TwoMorrows Publishing
Raleigh, North Carolina

\$17.95 in the US ISBN 1-893905-58-6